MEN & MANNERS OF MODERN CHINA

J. MACGOWAN

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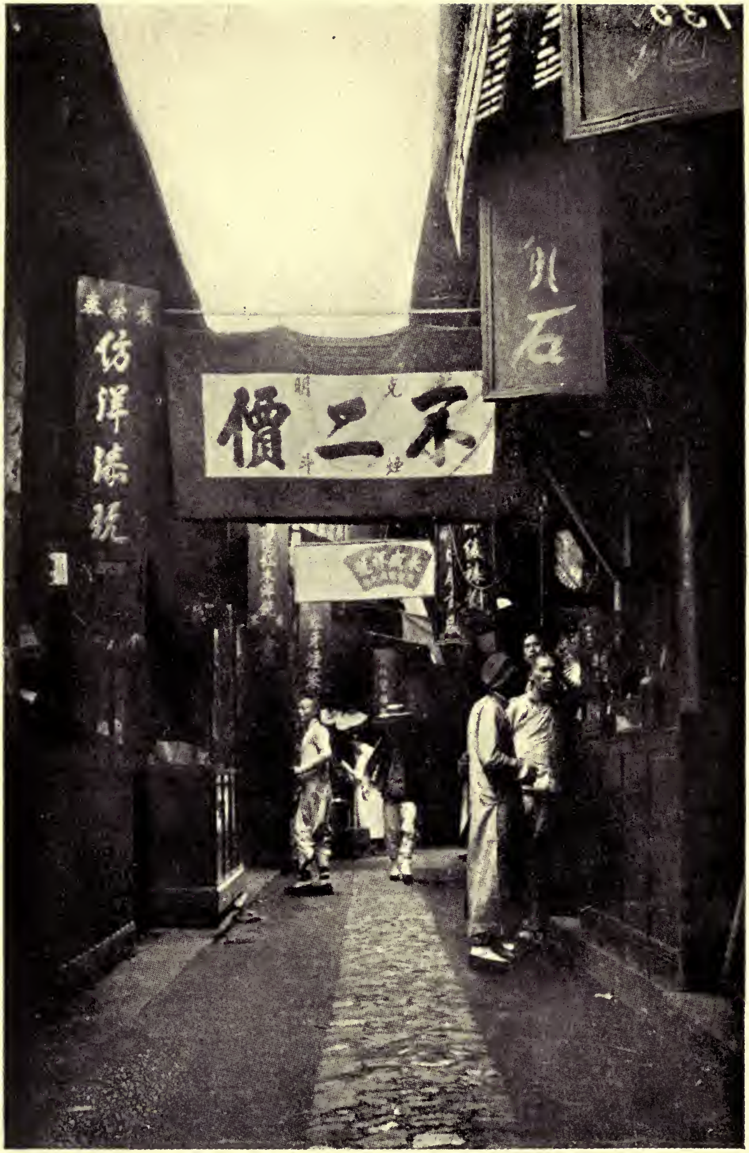
MEN AND MANNERS OF MODERN CHINA



A CITY STREET.

The three central characters mean " No two prices."

Frontispiece.

MEN AND MANNERS OF MODERN CHINA

BY

J. MACGOWAN

WITH 38 ILLUSTRATIONS

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PREFACE

THE pictures of Chinese life that are given in the pages of this work have been drawn from my own personal experience. I have lived in China for fifty years, and have mingled with almost every class in it. To do this has been a source of great pleasure to me. The more I got into the inner life of the Chinese the more did I feel my heart drawn to them. They are really a very lovable people, and when seen in their happiest moods, or when sorrow has been clouding their lives, or when aroused by some sense of injustice, they prove that they really possess the fibre of a great people.

Some foreign visitors to China have complained that the Chinese have no original genius and that they have failed in the power of development. The real reason for any halting in the progress of thought is the Dead Hand of the past that has gripped the nation for so many long centuries. I have seen a banyan-tree with wide-spreading boughs that on a summer's day could shelter a hundred people sitting beneath them so that the sun's rays should not reach them. I have also seen another of the same kind in a small flower-pot, with branches so entwined and interwoven amongst each other that all growth had been effectually stopped. This is an emblem of the Chinese nation. But the fatal hand is being unloosed and its shadowy, spidery fingers are slowly dissolving into thin air. Ere long Nature will avenge herself for the wrong that has been done by a new creation of energy.

The Chinese are a strong race. Two great deeds in their history prove this. One was done in the remote past; the other, as if to prove there has been no loss of power in the intervening ages, is being done at the present moment.

Two centuries before Christ, Shih Huang-ti, the Napoleon of China, built the Great Wall to prevent the wild and nomad tribes from harrowing China. The Chinese name for this is a very pretty one. They call it "The City Wall of Ten Thousand Miles in Length" because it has the exact semblance of the walls that encircle every city in the country, only in this case the whole empire is the city.

The wall is over twenty feet in height. At regular intervals blockhouses have been built where the soldiers may live when guarding the empire from an invading foe. For more than thirteen hundred miles it winds its way over hills and great plains and lofty mountains. It crosses ravines and mountain beds that in winter are filled with roaring, raging torrents. It has stood the wear and tear of twenty and more centuries. The snows of winter have fallen upon it and mighty hurricanes have tried to level it to the ground, whilst the blazing suns of countless ages have worked with disintegrating forces to tear it in pieces. And yet to-day it seems to stand with undiminished strength, as though the masons had only but yesterday cast their trowels to the ground.

The second great deed is now being done. Seventy years ago a great Western Power forced on China an opium treaty at the mouth of the cannon. Since then, not a Dead Hand, but a mailed fist, has been held up threateningly to prevent its being evaded. Her merchants have carried on the opium traffic and her warships have patrolled the Eastern seas to see that they are not defrauded of their rights.

During the passing years tens and hundreds of thousands of chests of opium have been brought from another land to enrich these foreign merchants and to add to the revenue of the country in which it was grown. What reeked the conqueror of the sorrow and vice and broken hearts and shattered lives! The mailed fist was still held defiantly aloft.

The years dragged slowly on for China, and during these opium was slowly weaving its web over the land, and its black fingers were fastening themselves round the hearts of countless thousands, and homes were being desolated by a curse that the Government might never try to remove, for the iron fist was always on guard.

It seemed to me many and many a time that the nation was lost. The country was covered at times with the bloom of the poppy. The evil had sunk so deeply into the life of the people that, looking broadly at the nation, there seemed no possible remedy in the future.

And then the great miracle took place. The passion that had been burning in the hearts of the best men in the country blazed forth with a mighty fire. The conqueror was appealed to some five years ago or so, and slowly the mailed arm was dropped.

To-day the bloom of the poppy is vanishing out of the land, and it is hoped that in another year or two the opium will have been expelled from the whole of the eighteen provinces.

What other nation in the world could have accomplished what the people of China have done in so short a period of time?

The chapters in this volume, with the exception of the closing one, originally appeared as individual articles in the *North China Herald*, Shanghai, China. They were subsequently published in book form in China, under the title of "Lights and Shadows of Chinese Life." They have since been revised and enlarged. By the kind courtesy of the editor permission has been given me to have them republished in England for the benefit of English readers.

J. MACGOWAN.

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Men and Manners of Modern China

CHAPTER I

THE LAND AND ITS LAWS

FROM the very earliest days of Chinese history, it has always been held by the nation that the whole of the land in the empire belongs to the Emperor. All the mountains that raise their blue summits to the sky; the fruitful valleys, the wild uncultivated wastes and the rich plains, are all his. Whenever the State requires any property for public use, it simply, therefore, demands it from its present occupant, paying about half its actual value, merely as a solatium to his feelings, and not as an acknowledgment of his real ownership in the property. King Ahab, if he had been a Chinese Emperor, would have gained possession of the coveted vineyard of Naboth without having to resort to the painful experience that ultimately secured it to him. He would simply have sent his officers to confiscate it, and Naboth would have at once yielded to the demand and retired as gracefully as his feelings would have allowed him, leaving his inheritance in the possession of the king.

When it was decided some years ago to erect telegraphs throughout the empire, the question as to how much would be required to meet the expenses of trespassing on people's property never entered into the calculations of the Government. The lines would pass over thousands of miles of country, through densely populated regions, amongst peoples fierce and independent in their manners, and through tracts of country where the authority of the mandarins was of the loosest possible description, and yet the question of the right to plant poles in fields or gardens, or in a man's front yard, was never once seriously raised.

Many thought that such a striking innovation would result in disturbances, especially as it came into collision with fengshui, that ghostly antiquated bogy that sends the Chinese into fits whenever he thinks he has violated any of its laws. Nothing of the kind, however, happened. No sooner had the Government taken up the matter, than every voice was stilled, and the poles were put in position as quietly as though the telegraph system was an ancient institution of China, and had been invented in the dark and misty ages of Chinese history, when Fuh Hi or Shin Nung performed the marvellous wonders that tradition declares they did.

On one occasion, indeed, there was a slight opposition. The workmen had dug a hole for a pole close to a grave where a man who had been a distinguished scholar lay buried. The land had been the gift of an Emperor, who had held him in high honour. The son, who also was a man of distinction, felt terrified when he saw the man ruthlessly digging close to where his father lay. He had a vision of unseen spirits, angered and inflamed, ready to hurl destruction upon his family, and to wrest from them all the honours and wealth they had bestowed upon it. He accordingly stepped into the hole that had been dug, and declared that he would rather perish than allow the pole to be placed in it. He was careful to explain that he was not resisting the Emperor's right to the land, but the place where his father lay buried, having been a royal gift, he considered that he had a special right to it. It seemed for a moment as though a complete stoppage would have been put to the work, when the Chinese official, who accompanied the foreign constructors of the line to assist them in such complications as the present, stepped up to the man, who was sitting with his legs in the hole, and said to him: "I am astonished at a man of your scholarship and ability acting in this childish manner. You ought to be perfectly aware that every foot of land in the empire belongs to the Emperor; all the honours you possess are his gift. This line," he continued, pointing with a wave of his hand to the long procession of poles that spectre-like dotted the plain till they vanished in the horizon, "is being made by his special command. Would you resist that? You know that he has the power to order you and your wife and your children to be seized and to be cut into a thousand pieces, and none would question his right to do so." The scholar was so impressed with this brief but eloquent speech that he at once rose and, bowing gracefully before the official in acknowledgment of the courtesy he had shown him, he retired without a word, and left the workmen to continue their labours.

With the exception of the dues collected at the various custom houses throughout the country, the only direct tax imposed by the Imperial Government has been the land tax. Taxes for education, for the army and navy, for the defence of the Empire, as well as rates for the police, the poor, &c., are absolutely unknown. The civil list in China is a very model of simplicity, and gives the executive very little anxiety, for there are automatic systems that have been in existence from the earliest times that provide for the salaries and expenses of public servants in a manner highly satisfactory to every one, excepting to the long-suffering masses from whom the money has been extracted.

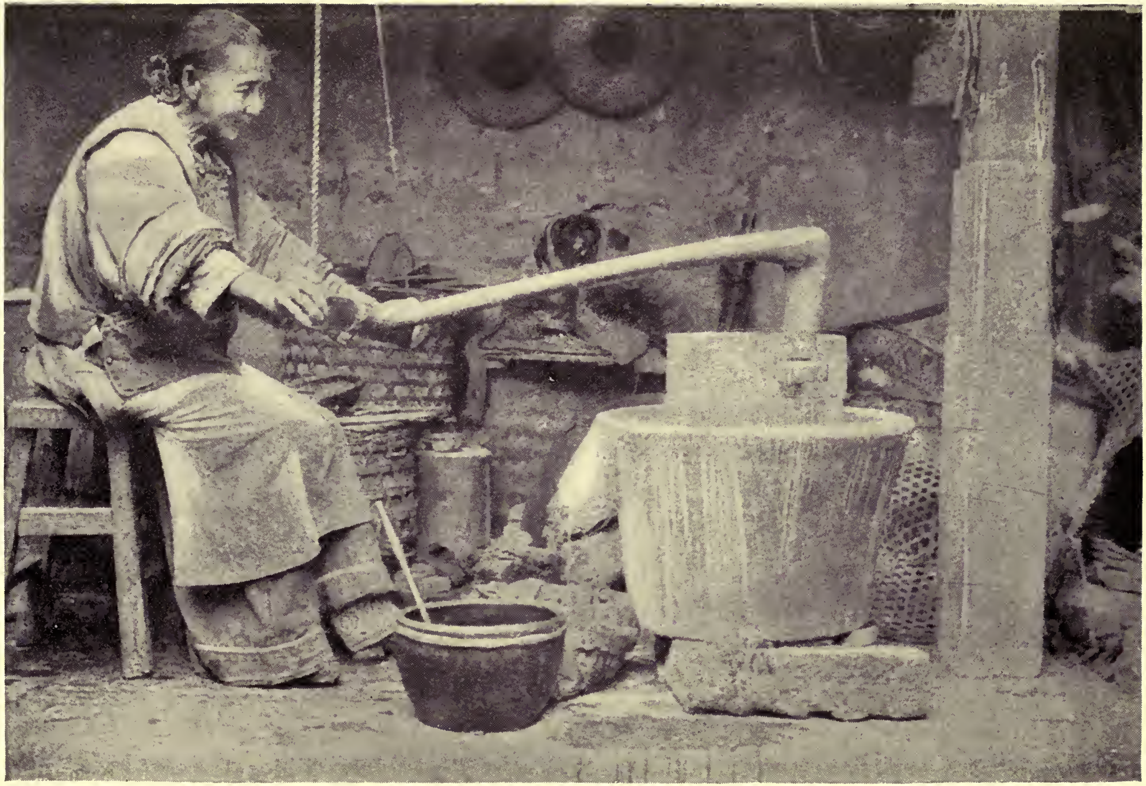
The method by which the land tax has been collected will illustrate those beautiful economic systems by which the Government can carry on the business of the country without any outlay for salaries and incidental expenses whatever. It may be well to explain here that whenever a new dynasty has taken over the government of the Empire, it has always been accustomed to promulgate a Constitution drawn up by itself, which was to be the basis of all legislation in the future. When the Manchus stepped into power in A.D. 1644, acting on the precedents of the past, they issued what they called "The Laws and Regulations of the Great Ching Dynasty." In that document the land registers were revised, and the amount that every man's farm or holding had to pay was definitely fixed. This seems to have been done in a very fair and generous spirit. The Government which affects to be a paternal one showed in this case, at least, great anxiety that this tax should not be an oppressive one. It was decided that in what are called "wet lands," the standard of taxation should be rice seed, and that a field on which could be sown a Chinese measure that approximates to our peck should be taxed a certain sum, whilst in " dry lands " peas should be the standard.

As lands vary greatly in fertility, there was no uniformity in the levying of these taxes. In rich and productive districts the " wet lands " that are capable of being sown with a peck of seed will pay as much as eightpence or ninepence, whilst the " dry lands " will pay a little more than half of those amounts. Other districts again that are less fruitful, or are far removed from water, are taxed at a proportionately less sum, but in all cases due care has been taken that the farmers shall not be unduly distressed.

This land tax is a very moderate one and has existed unchanged since the usurpation of the Manchus, and even to-day it remains precisely the same, and is still being collected as though no revolution had taken place. The republic has not yet been legally instituted, and yet the Chinese with an instinct of order and obedience to law are carrying on the old order of things even though the Emperor has vanished and the States' parliaments have not yet been summoned.

Whilst the tax is far from being oppressive, the mode of its collection often brings great sorrow and injustice to those who may be quite willing to pay it. The tax-gatherers have always been men of notoriously evil reputation, and who from the very nature of the case must be dishonest. Not only have they no salaries, but they have actually to purchase their positions. The only privilege they demand in return for this outlay of their money is a free hand to get as much out of the people, by guile, by ruse, or by cunning, as they can ; only they must be careful that everything they do must have an appearance of legality. Law, and ancient custom, and hoary traditions are sacred in the eyes of the Chinese, but there are a thousand-and-one ways by which these may be evaded, while the semblance of respect for them is still maintained.

A free-handed system like this exactly suits the genius of the Chinese, who prefer oblique methods to direct ones. It opens out a boundless field, where money can be gained more easily than by settled



GRINDING RICE.

salaries. It is known to be thoroughly iniquitous, and yet no one ever dreams of suggesting that it should be abolished. The founders of the empire practised it. The sages, if we could only have access to their private banking accounts, no doubt encouraged it. Great statesmen and rulers and prime ministers during successive ages have been implicated in it. Great revolutions have rent the empire into a thousand pieces because of this and kindred abuses that had driven the people mad, and yet when the storm has passed, and the nation has settled down to a new life, the old intolerable systems have been resumed, just as though they contained within them the germs of a new force that was going to renovate the empire.

The system by which the tax-gatherer has lived has a deteriorating effect upon himself. He is hated and despised by every one, and rightly so. His mind is always absorbed with money. That floats before him as he walks the road. In company, its gleams catch his eye. In conversation, when he seems absorbed in some discussion, his mind is still under its unseen influence. His district is a golden mine that is to give him his daily bread. It is to fill his home with plenty, to enable him to purchase fields, and lay by money that shall buy his sons their wives. It is a mine that has to be worked, however. Just as the real gold is hidden away in the earth, and skill and labour and self-denial are required to extract it, so in this, the keenest and subtlest, as well as the basest qualities of the mind have to be exercised to draw forth the precious metal.

It is through chicanery and deception, through lies unspeakable, by false accusations that bring men within the covetous grasp of the mandarins, and through extortions that will fling misery and wretchedness upon many a home, that the work of the tax-gatherer has to be accomplished.

He comes round twice a year to receive his dues, and from the moment he starts, till he has finished his round, he is planning and manœuvring how he shall cheat and defraud the unfortunate country people who are unlucky enough to come within his clutches. The Chinese being miserably poor, the majority of them have no money ready to pay their taxes, and so they are put to the greatest straits to get together the sums they owe. The women take their gold earrings or silver hairpins with which they ornament their long, black hair, or perhaps the men take their agricultural implements and hurry with them to the nearest pawnshop. Some who have no property sufficient to meet the demands that are made upon them are treated in a very rough and cruel manner. The very clothes upon their backs, and even the solitary rice-pan in which the food of the family is cooked, are taken from them without remorse.

A favourite plan with these harpies is to allow a man who is pretty well off to pass the proper time in which payment ought to have been made. This is a simple matter with the Chinese, who rarely in any matter are up to time. There is a subtle influence in the air of the East that puts a drag upon a man, and even the vigorous Westerner by and by feels his footstep becoming slower and a tendency to put things off creeping over him.

When a few weeks later he presents himself with his money for payment, the tax-gatherer, with an assumed look of indignation, demands from him his reason for refusing to pay his tax. The unfortunate man, who sees that he is going to be fleeced, makes the most humble apologies, and says that he thought that the delay of a week or two was of no importance. " No importance," the official cries in a loud voice, " that you should refuse to pay the Emperor his tax? You will find it to be a very important and at the same time a very expensive thing, for I shall not sign your receipt until you pay me double the amount you owe."

The poor victim is compelled to submit, for to appeal for justice to the mandarin would be useless. He would stand by the tax-gatherer, and every official in his court would do the same, for every man would be prepared to swear till his face was black that the debtor not only refused to pay his tax, but that when it was politely demanded from him he violently assaulted and half murdered the man that demanded it.

The inventive faculty of the tax-gatherer is a highly trained one, and ages of experience have taught his tribe the most ingenious ways of practising upon the wretched farmers. On one occasion, a man who owned a few small plots of land died, and as he had no relatives the family became extinct. The tax for the plots he owned must still, however, continue to be paid, for the Government allows of no default, as it is held that men may die but the land is imperishable. That is registered in the Doomsday Books, and the officials will be held responsible for the payment.

The collector was determined that it should not come out of his own pocket, so he set his wits to work to see how he could manœuvre to compel some one else to pay it. Marching up to the house of a well-to-do farmer he presented his bill for the taxes of the land which had no owner. He was met with indignant protests by the farmer, who said that he had no interest in the land in question. The collector, with a calm and placid smile that lit up his opium-dyed face, said, " I know better than that, for I have been credibly informed that you have actually taken possession of it and are now cultivating it on the sly."

This was a falsehood, pure and simple, but it served his purpose better than the truth would have done, for it irritated the farmer and made him lose his temper, the very thing that the tax-gatherer desired. Seizing him by the collar the collector began to drag him to the door with the purpose, he said, of taking him before the mandarin and having him thoroughly punished. The farmer, excited by a sense of injustice, lost all his prudence, and forgot the character of the man he was dealing with. He struck out in self-defence, and his two sturdy sons joining with him the foe was soon sprawling on his back on the ground.

A sense of victory consoled the tax-gatherer for his temporary humiliation. The thing had turned out just as he had planned it. He pretended to be seriously injured, and he lay groaning as though he were in mortal agony. One of his attendants fled in all haste to the neighbouring city, and ere long he returned with five policemen and also with the wife of the injured man, who made the place resound with her cries and with her threats of vengeance against those who had dared to lift their hands against her husband in the discharge of his public duties.

A prettier bit of comedy it would have been impossible to arrange. It had all the appearance of a tragedy, whilst in reality it was a screaming farce to every one but the farmer and his sons. Scenic effect has a wonderful charm for the Chinese. China is a land full of play actors, that seem to be continually arranging their stage and acting their parts before each other. Here was as nice a little plot with all the *dramatis personæ* as any one could desire. The villain of the piece was rolling in agonies on the ground.

The farmer, horror-struck because of the fatal blow that had stretched his foe on the ground, looked with blanched cheek and throbbing pulse on the man writhing before him. The wife rending the air with her screams, her hands turned wildly up to heaven and her hair falling in disorder down her back, the policemen, fierce and truculent-looking, and the crowd that stood gazing with fear and consternation in their looks all constitute a scene that, for dramatic effect, could not be surpassed had the whole been planned and carried out after many a rehearsal in the green-room.

As soon as the villain of the play saw that the acting had produced the desired effect a hint was let drop that negotiations for a settlement of the difficulty might now be entered upon. The farmer was only too willing for a compromise, for to come within the clutches of the mandarin meant that he would be squeezed of every cash that he possessed, and afterwards be cast penniless on the world. After a noisy discussion with these thieves, dressed in official robes and with the power of the State behind them, he got them to accept ten pounds to let the matter drop. With this sum the tax-collector, with his disreputable associates, left the village, quietly winking at each other as they got beyond its limits and chuckling over the successful haul they had made that day.

One of the most fruitful causes of dispute in China is the land. Poverty is widespread, and men are frequently compelled to borrow money on their holdings in order to pay off debts that must be met. Considering that more than half the population of China is in hopeless debt, it can easily be imagined how the one thing that is permanent in its nature should be held as the safest security for the repayment of money lent. The imperishable character of the land, however, does not prevent constant disputes and attempts to defraud, when from the very nature of Chinese justice grievous wrongs are endured by those who had neither power nor money enough to protect their rights.

A man, for example, mortgages his fields to some well-to-do neighbour, which by the deed he can reclaim after a certain number of years. At the end of the stipulated time he is as poor as when he borrowed, and he might as well dream of redeeming the moon as the ancestral lands that are now in the possession of another. Years pass by and still the blight of poverty rests upon the home, and perhaps fifty or sixty years elapse, when the son or grandson presents himself with the amount that had been borrowed and demands the restoration of the fields. In the meanwhile the new owners have become accustomed to the possession of the lands and they have determined that they shall never be given up.

A very common plan with unprincipled men of this class is to put such difficulties in the way that an appeal would have to be made to the mandarin, with the inevitable delays and bribings and legal expenses that would exhaust the purse of the poorer man and leave the property in the hands of the wrong-doer. Another not uncommon method is to manufacture deeds that would go to prove that the lands in dispute had always been the property of the family that now holds them. The way this is done is very ingenious. A deed is drawn up in the usual legal phraseology and buried in the earth for a certain time, until it becomes tinged with a colour that gives it an ancient look. It is then put into an iron pan and gradually heated over a slow fire till it is browned with the exact hue that the centuries are accustomed to put into these documents. The change is so true to nature that even the eye of an expert is very often deceived.

Some years ago a case occurred which illustrates what I mean. A grandson came to redeem some fields that had been mortgaged by his grandfather. A gleam of prosperity had come into his home, and, with the loyalty of the Chinese to the memory of his ancestors, he wished to get back the property that had been bequeathed by them to their children. The holders of the land denied that they had ever mortgaged it. It had been theirs for ages, they said, and they produced time-worn and age-stained documents in defence of their claim. An appeal was made to the County Magistrate to decide the question. This man happened to be one of the just kind. He was a scholar as well who had deeply studied the history of his country. Wishing to be fair to both parties he keenly examined the manufactured deeds, which had every sign of age imprinted upon their face. With eyebrows knit and gaze fixed upon the brown discoloured pages, as though he would pierce the secret that lay behind those weird old-world characters, he pondered the mystery he was called upon to solve.

The claimant possessed deeds that had the look of genuineness about them, but the defendant had others, upon which the air of antiquity undoubtedly rested. Which of them were the true ones was the supreme question he had to decide. All at once a smile flashed over his face, and, turning to the defendant, he said: "Your deeds have been most ingeniously made up and they would certainly deceive any ordinary reader, and yet, as you know, they are forgeries. There is one thing in them that proves this decisively. You are evidently not acquainted with early history, and so you have introduced into your deeds the name of an Emperor that did not exist at the time they profess to have been written. You must, therefore, at once hand back the fields to the rightful owner." In this case justice was done, but it may be easily imagined what wrongs have been perpetrated in the numberless cases where the judges were neither just nor learned.

With regard to the division of landed property, custom is very precise and definite. There is no law of primogeniture that secures it to the eldest son. After the death of the father the land is equally divided amongst the sons, with the exception that the first-born has a slightly larger share to compensate him for the responsibilities that devolve upon him as the head of the family, now that his father has gone.

The daughters have no share in the division, for marriages having been arranged for them, they are considered as practically belonging to the clan into which they are married, since no woman may become the wife of any member of her own clan.

With regard to the ancestral home, this becomes the common property of the sons, where they reside with their families. Such a state of things is utterly abhorrent to an Englishman, but not to the Chinese, who have no sympathy with our ideas that each family ought to have a separate home for itself. The division of the ancestral home amongst the sons, where each lives in different apartments of the same building, seems to them an ideal settlement of the case. With us this arrangement would be liable to result in quarrels and estrangements that would make the common life absolutely intolerable. This has not been the experience of the Chinese. The Chinese has a mad craving for the society of his fellow-men that makes crowding an absolute luxury to him. When he builds a street he puts the houses as near to each other as it is possible for him to get them, leaving the minimum of space to allow of the passage of the public. This is not because there is a dearth of land. It is as much an obedience to instinct as it is for the beaver to build galleries in a confined space by the river's side.

For years and generations the Chinese have been confined to their own country. They have been rooted to the soil. They have been born and have died almost upon the very spot where they have passed their lives. The names of foreign countries have a strange and barbarous sound to them, whilst their peoples are despised and savagely hated by them. Their instincts have all been narrowed down to the people about them, so much so that love for the larger world beyond has been lost, and patriotism has been so utterly unknown to them that even at the present day, when that virtue is growing within their hearts, they have not yet devised any one word that will adequately express it.

China is a huge conglomerate of rabbit warrens, where the people grow and multiply and develop affinities that bind them more and more to the same spot. A man wants to open a shoe-shop, and the instinct of his class draws him to the streets where every shop is occupied by shoemakers. The drapers are not spread over a city, but are concentrated in one or two quarters, and so one would find it difficult to buy a yard of cloth or a skein of silk outside of these certain limits.

It is this same instinct that leads Chinese families to live rabbit-like in close proximity to each other, in the midst of din and loud noises and with the sounds of the human voice incessantly breaking on the ear. The Chinese does not want quiet. He wants company. A babel of voices is the sweetest music he can hear. His most luxuriant enjoyment is to sit in a densely-packed crowd that is gazing with rapt admiration at a street play, where the shouting of the actors and the deafening noise of cymbals and drums would be sufficient to drive an Occidental out of his senses.

The effect of the perpetually recurring subdivision of the ancestral acres is that the farms throughout the country are usually small. There is no question in my mind, however, but that the absence of the law of primogeniture has saved the Chinese nation from great misery and has enabled it somewhat successfully to meet the problems that its vast population has brought upon it. With their intense conservatism, and with the superstition that prevented the mineral riches of the country from being developed, the younger sons would have starved had the eldest been given the whole of the land at their father's death. As it is, the industry of the Chinese, which amounts to a kind of mania, and their power of living upon very little, have given a lease of life to this long-lived empire that has enabled it to survive whilst the ancient monarchies of the past have drifted into oblivion.

CHAPTER II

HOW THE EMPIRE IS GOVERNED

THE model of the Chinese Government is the family. This is not a modern idea, but is as old as Confucius, who gave the sanction of his name and his genius to it, and who declared that a well-regulated family was a perfect conception of how an empire should be ruled.

To understand this, it must be explained that the relation of its members to each other is much more stringent than in an English home. In the latter the children are under the control of their parents till they are of age, and then they hive off, marry, and form establishments of their own. In China only the daughters leave the home for good, when they are married, and they then cease to be ruled by their parents. The sons never leave the old roof-tree, and never get free from parental restraint. No matter how old they may be or how the years may have covered their heads with white locks, their father and mother have precisely the same power over them that they had when they were children. They marry and have families of their own, but they all live in the same homestead and they never dream that because the years have been creeping on and furrows have found their way into their faces, that the authority of the old folk is to be in the least relaxed.

Beside the common tie of affection that binds the members of the home to each other, there is another that welds it together with a bond that the years may never sever, and that is that invisible, mysterious, but most potent force called Responsibility. This is a word that cannot be understood by an Englishman in the sense that a Chinese thinks of it. It permeates the family; it winds its invisible way into every phase of society ; it touches with its magic wand the official acts of every mandarin in the empire, and it is the one controlling influence that is felt around the Dragon Throne, and that often stays the hand of unrighteousness, when nothing else could curb either his hand or his will.

Taking the family as the starting-point, it is here where this thoroughly Oriental conception, that the individual must be content to merge his personality and his freedom in his family or his clan, is carried out as an object lesson for the rest of society. Every member of the household is responsible for all the rest. The father as head of the family is held liable for the misdeeds of the various members of it, whilst the sons on the other hand are treated as criminals for the wrong-doing of their parents. It is because of this that some of the most awful tragedies that have blackened the pages of Chinese history have been enacted. Some high official has been caught in some treasonable act. Not only has he been put to death with most barbarous cruelty, but all his relatives, both on the father's and mother's side, have been exterminated. Men and women and little children have all been ruthlessly butchered and the executions have ceased only when no more victims remained to be slaughtered.

But this system of mutual responsibility is not confined to the family. It runs throughout the whole of society. It may be truly said that there is not an individual in the whole of the empire that is not in some way or another responsible to some one else. The nation may be compared to a highly complicated machine, made up of endless wheels that whirl and revolve apparently in the utmost confusion. There are cogs, too, innumerable, that fit into each other with the most beautiful precision, and without which the machinery would stumble and fall into disorder.

From the eternal past the social system of the Chinese has been built up on this conception. All the men in the country, from the highest to the lowest, are but cogs in the great machine that is carrying out the life of the nation.

It is this profound sense of mutual responsibility that has caused the various trades and professions in China to band themselves into local trades' unions, with a headman over each, who acts on emergencies and tries to protect those whom he represents. The headman is conspicuous everywhere all over China, and is a most useful personage when any trouble is experienced. You hire a boat, for example, and when you are approaching the landing-place some of the boatmen lying by, waiting to be hired, take liberties with you. You send for the headman of the jetty and you state your case, and if you are in the right he speedily brings the culprits to their knees, and you may be sure you will never be troubled again by these men, though you were to land near them a thousand times.

After one has lived in China for some time and studied its institutions, the one thought that strikes one is the system of responsibility that pervades every department of life. This is not of a loose and indefinite character, but is so thoroughly organised, that one knows exactly where to lay one's hand upon any one at any particular crisis when the blame or credit for anything has to be located.

In order to facilitate this pervasive idea of the empire, society has spontaneously divided itself into sections with a headman to each, to whom the members can look for protection when difficulties arise. Each trade, for example, has its headmen, who sedulously guard the interests of the whole and who are responsible for any infraction of right by any of its members. The pawnshops of a town select one to represent all the rest in case of litigation, or of any attempt on the part of the mandarins to squeeze any one of their number. Every village has its headmen and almost every important street, in every city in the country, and even the very beggars, poor and ragged and unsavoury, have their headman, who claims a share of their earnings, but who at the same time protects them in their rights and stands between them and oppression.

Now, in the official life, even more than in the social, the master-thought that pervades the whole is still that of responsibility. Each holder of office is responsible to the one next in rank above him, and so in endless gradations till the Emperor himself is reached. A reference to facts will prove this to be the case.

The very lowest man in office is called the Tipao (the Protector of the land). He is the headman in a ward. Every town in China is divided into so many wards ; in the rural districts villages are grouped into divisions of the same kind, and over each of these there is a Tipao. This man is usually a person of no education and no social standing, and as a rule is conspicuous for the absence of all moral qualities. His functions are of an exceedingly miscellaneous description. He is supposed to know every one in his ward, his occupations, what he is doing either by day or night, what scheme his brain is plotting, and what are his private sources of income. He has a large amount of arbitrary power, for he can refuse to allow persons of doubtful reputation or uncertain means to reside within his jurisdiction, and he can summarily eject, without any process of law, loose characters who are a trouble to the community and who may not have the means of bribing his goodwill.

It is his duty to report to his superior officer anything important that is going on in his ward, and to inform him of everything that he knows concerning it, and a great deal besides that he could not possibly know. He is liable at any moment to be beaten into a jelly for something that has taken place in his district that it was utterly out of the question that he should be aware of. The Tipao, therefore, must be a man of fertile imagination, ready wit, and easy conscience. Of course, in every ward there are bad characters. There are opium-smokers whose fortunes have vanished down their pipes, and professional thieves who sally out in the small hours of the morning. There are also gamblers, consumed with a passion that never brings them the longed-for wealth, and ballad singers who stand in the dark corners of the thoroughfares and sing lurid and obscene songs to the little knots of men that look bad enough to have just come from the pit.

Every one of these is known to the Tipao, and each one, if he wishes to be let alone, must pay blackmail ; or if he wishes to avoid being reported to the local mandarin, who would take a short and easy method of ridding the neighbourhood of his presence. The

Tipao is a man whose morality is only slightly, if anything, higher than the dangerous classes he has to control. He is consequently willing to wink at a great deal so long as it does not become so outrageous as to attract the attention of the public. Still, the fact remains that he is responsible for the conduct of the people that he allows to remain within his jurisdiction, and he may be called upon at any moment by his superior to undergo the severest bodily pains for things that he knows, and indeed for others that he could not possibly have known about, unless he were possessed of omnipresence.

The beautiful theory of responsibility that permeates the Chinese brain brushes aside the ordinary excuses that weigh with an Occidental, and the man is held guilty for offences that no single human being could possibly have foreseen or prevented.

I will now give an illustration of what I mean. Two men were gambling in an obscure part of the town, in a room hidden away from observation. A dispute arose over the game which ended in a fight, and one of them received a fatal stab. It was two o'clock in the morning when this took place. The whole city was asleep, and the Tipao and his family were in bed, so that he was perfectly unconscious of the tragedy. His protestations that he knew nothing of the matter were received with a sneer and with the remark, "Well, then, you ought to have known." "But how could I?" he modestly replied. "Never mind how," was the official answer, "that is your business. The ward is in your charge, and you are the responsible person to look after it." With that he was thrown upon his face and a couple of sturdy lictors, who had been looking at him with hungry and expectant eyes, proceeded to administer with their bamboos a lesson in the art of ruling a ward that would keep him in a recumbent posture for at least a week to come.

At a considerable distance above the Tipao comes the County Magistrate, the most important, as far as the people are concerned, of all the mandarins. There are many superior to him in rank, but none has such large executive duties to perform as he. Whatever orders may be issued by the highest mandarins in regard to any particular county, they are always transmitted to him, and it is he that must see to the carrying of them out.

His duties are very wide and very important. He is the executive officer of the county, and all questions of property, taxes, litigation, as well as of crime, have to be settled in his court. His relation to the people is well expressed by a title that is popularly given him by them—" The mandarin, who is the father and mother of his people."

The family being the ideal type for the government of a nation, the aim of the Chinese is to keep that thought prominently before the minds both of the rulers and of the ruled. The County Magistrate is reminded by this title that the parental idea must be always uppermost in his mind in all his public acts, and that whilst he has to administer justice, sternly and strictly, he must at the same time act as a wise and loving father would.

Two villages, for example, have a private feud, and one day they seize their jingals, and a number are killed on both sides. A son goes to the bad, gambles away everything he has, and in his effort to carry off something from his father's home, he knocks him down and kills him. A band of thieves from the next county come over the border and loot a pawnshop, and murder some of the inmates, who attempt to defend their property. These disorders are not put down to the evil passions of those concerned so much as to the County Magistrate, who is also styled, perhaps by way of a joke, " The man that knows the county." They are the result, it is affirmed by his superior officers, of some mismanagement or of something defective in his moral character. The theory is that, when a ruler is inspired by the noblest motives and his life is pure, the people will have no murderous thoughts, but will be inclined to follow those higher instincts that Heaven has implanted in the breast of every man.

Though the Chinese doctrine of responsibility has its defects, there is no doubt that it has also its good points. How often in England have disasters occurred both in civil and military life, and no one has been punished simply because the responsibility could not be fixed on any particular person. This could never be the case in China. There is always some one who can be made answerable for any mismanagement, and who can be punished for it.

The captain of a man-of-war, for example, is responsible for his ship under every circumstance. The storm may rage, and the great seething seas may drive her upon a lee shore, but no alleviating reasons are allowed to be urged in his defence. The ship had been entrusted to him by the Emperor. It was, therefore, sacred property which he was bound to preserve intact for his Majesty. He consented to take charge of the vessel knowing full well the responsibility he incurred, and so he must be prepared for the penalty that he knew he would have to pay.

A friend of mine was captain of a Corvette at the time that the French fleet in 1884 attacked the Chinese men-of-war in the harbour of Foochow. In a short time most of the latter were battered and sunk and the crews that were not killed were floating on the river amid the wreck of their vessels. My friend, seeing that the destruction of his ship was inevitable, slipped his cable and turned her into a narrow creek, where he sunk her in shallow water, so as to prevent her being captured by the French. He knew that she could be easily raised again after the enemy had retired. One would have thought that he would have been praised for saving his ship, but not so. His conduct was considered to be so disgraceful by the Board of War in Peking that he barely escaped with his life, and he was sentenced to banishment to some barren region in the vicinity of the River Amur. His defence that he really saved his vessel had no weight with his judges. The question was, What right had he to sink a ship belonging to his Majesty? He was responsible for her and it was his business to see that she sustained no damage, either from the violence of the tempest or from the shot of the enemy.

This doctrine of responsibility is a very comfortable one to a foreigner when he is travelling through the country. The innkeepers where he lodges are so afraid of anything happening to him or his whilst he is under their roof that the greatest care is taken whilst he is their guest, lest they should be called to account for any injury done to him or his property. It is told how on one occasion a certain Boniface pursued a guest, who left early in the morning, for miles along the road, with some article that he had left behind him. He was panting and perspiring when he got up with him and there was great amusement when the innkeeper with a pleased and virtuous look handed him over an empty match-box.

Passing through the various gradations of mandarins, who, high and low, are but cogs in the huge wheel of state, we come finally to the Emperor himself, and the question now arises, To whom was he responsible? for it would seem to suit the genius of the Chinese not to allow even him to be free from a law that binds every one else within his dominions.

One of his titles has been the "Sacred Supreme," which implied that he stood outside all criticism, and that he was the one man in China that never needed to give an account of his actions to any human being. There were the Six Boards, it is true, that assisted in the government of the empire, but the Emperor's authority over them was absolute, and he could override their decisions at his will.

The censors, too, seem to have had the power of calling in question the conduct of their Sovereign, but their influence was rather a moral one than anything else. Whenever they gave their advice, or called in question some conduct of his that appeared to them injurious to the State, they did so at their own peril, for they were liable to be sent into banishment, or even to be executed, should their conduct be resented by him.

And yet after all he was as much under the universal law as the meanest of his subjects, only that he was accountable to Heaven, and to Heaven only. The theory has always been that he held his throne by its direct decree, and accordingly Heaven considered him responsible for the way in which he carried out the duties of the State. When he was conscientious and acted for the best interest of his people, Heaven sent down blessings upon the nation. When he was unprincipled and reckless, famines and pestilences, and war, and revolution were the punishments that the same silent Power hurled upon the people for his sins. This theory is as old as the Chinese nation. Eight centuries before Christ, there is an account in one of the Chinese Classics, called the Book of Odes, of an eclipse of the sun that filled the empire with dismay, and in some places with disaster. The mountains were so terrified that they fell into the plain and dammed up rivers so that floods caused widespread desolation. All this, it is said, was the result of the misconduct of the reigning monarch, who was thus reminded by Heaven that his iniquities were known, and that severer punishment would be meted out to him if he did not repent and govern his kingdom better.

The moral element in the government of the empire is a very large factor that is recognised both by the rulers and the ruled. The visible machinery that is composed of living men is like a huge net, the meshes of which are spread with never-ending entanglement and which bind each successive grade and division of society, the one to the other, by the mysterious bond of Responsibility. But outside of all this, there is another force, unseen, mysterious, but with eyes that never close, and a purpose that can never be turned from rectitude, and that is Heaven.

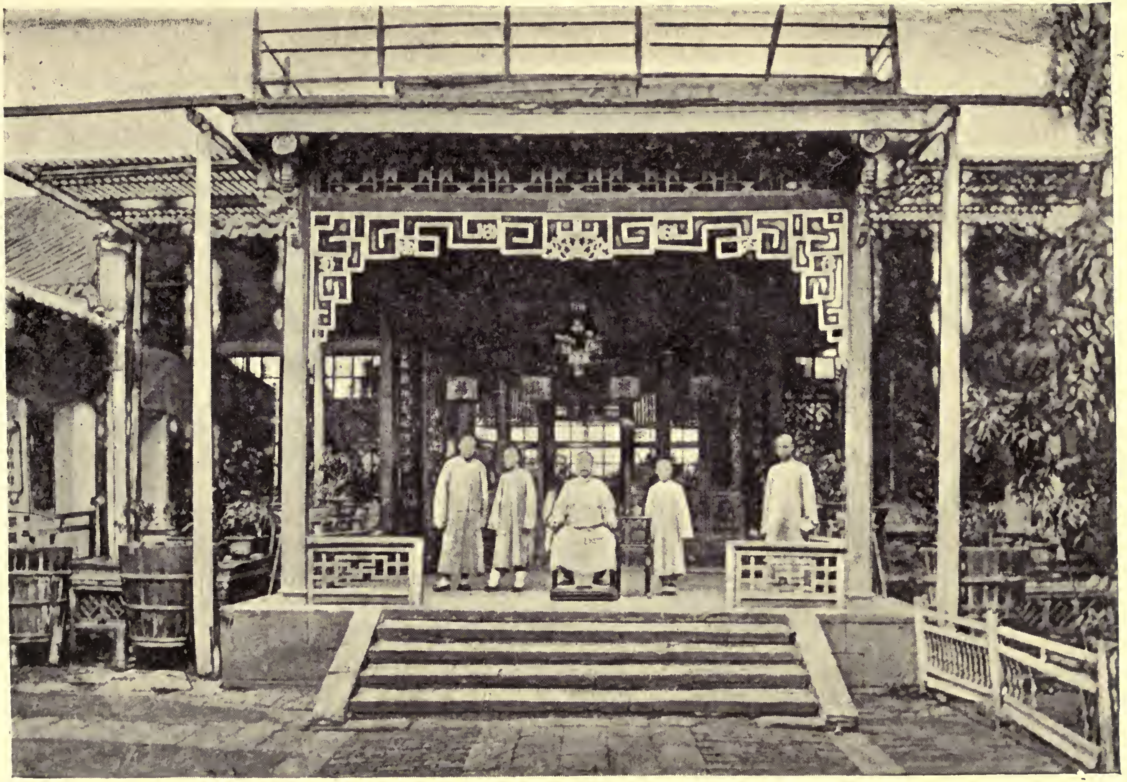
And it must be understood that whilst the Emperor, who was styled the Son of Heaven, was supposed to be specially under its supervision, and to hold his very crown from it, this great impersonal undefined Power makes no distinctions between emperors and common people. " The eyes of Heaven " with keen impartiality scan the wrongdoings of every man and woman, and send down punishment upon every one, no matter what his position may be. No one ever disputes this fact, and so it comes to pass that every official, from the Tipao up to the Son of Heaven, whilst he feels responsible to the man in rank above him, has a dim idea that outside of them he is accountable to Heaven, who will one day bring him to book for any evil that he may do.

On one occasion, in a large southern city, the people were dying in large numbers from the effects of a very deadly fever that had appeared amongst them. In the narrow, crowded streets and in the ill-drained, unsavoury dwellings men and women died by hundreds. The doctors were unable to cope with the disease, for their medicines seemed to have lost their power. A cry of agony rose from every direction in the sorrowful city, for death with impartial hand carried off the young man in the very vigour of his strength, the young maiden blooming into womanhood, the child in arms, and the old man, with his head hoary with the passage of years. The town was in a panic, for the fear of death was in the heart of every one. Every day the tale of death grew larger and wild rumours increased the feeling of alarm. The great sun looked down with a face of fire upon the doomed city, and his hot, scorching rays added to the sorrows of those who were suffering.

At last, the chief mandarin of the town, oppressed by the calamities, and with a sense that he was in some measure responsible for them, determined to appeal to Heaven. He, accordingly, next morning at the earliest dawn stood out in the open, and lifting up his eyes to the grey sky pleaded with Heaven to take away the disease from the town. "I know that I am at fault," he said, "that I have misgoverned, and that thou art sending down death upon the people for my misdeeds. My heart is wrung with sorrow and I pray Heaven that my sins may be visited upon myself, and that I may die if only the suffering may be saved."

The empire is thus founded upon a moral basis. The Emperor had got his crown from Heaven, to whom alone he is responsible. When his dynasty finally passed away amid revolution and murder and dire disasters, the hand of Heaven was seen in the whole, and it was because the rulers were unworthy to sit on the Dragon Throne that they were compelled by that unseen but righteous Power to give way for better men.

The profound belief that Heaven is the final Court of Appeal when misgovernment has driven the nation into revolution has no doubt tended to keep alive the democratic spirit that lies deeply imbedded in the Chinese heart. This unseen force, like some mighty monster, lay slumbering for many centuries. For many ages it never had a proper chance of asserting itself.



MANDARIN AND STAFF.

The lofty ranges of mountains on the west lay as impassable barriers to prevent the invasion of thought that made the countries beyond throb and vibrate with a new life. The mad jealousy of the mandarins kept the seaboard provinces from being tainted with Western civilisation and revolutionary ideas.

The nation needed stirring by some great act that would send its blood flowing in a surging flood, and it may be truly said that the first throbbings of the new life that is pulsating through the empire to-day began their beat when the echoes of the English guns were heard reverberating through the Empire. Those echoes have never died out, but other sounds have come from the West, and new thoughts of life, and a vision of a new heaven and a new earth has flashed into men's eyes, whilst fairy fingers have been weaving poetry and romance, that have inspired men with conceptions such as their fathers never dreamed of as to how an empire should be governed.

CHAPTER III

THE CHINESE MILITARY SYSTEM

THE military system in China is an ancient one and dates far back beyond the time when standing armies became an established institution in the West. This is accounted for by the fact that in the very early days of the nation's life, fierce and bloody contests were constantly being waged by the men who laid the foundations of this empire. The China of those days was of very limited area, and consisted of a considerable number of States, nominally acknowledging one as supreme, but independent and rebellious when they thought themselves strong enough to resist. They were incessantly at war amongst themselves, either in self-defence or in the attempt to master and absorb the weaker ones. Finally, one State, led by the genius of its duke, who has been called the Napoleon of China, successively conquered all its rivals, and incorporating their dominions with its own established the Tsin dynasty, and enthroned him the first Emperor of United China. From that time there began a system of conquest that has resulted in the building up of the present Chinese Empire.

People in the West, who are unacquainted with the history of the Chinese, think of them as an essentially unwarlike people to whom the idea of the battlefield, and fierce struggles with brave and daring foes, is one from which the nation has always shrunk. This is an entire mistake. With the exception perhaps of the English, there is no army in the world that has done so much fighting in the past as the Chinese. The march to victory has been one vast series of struggles, in which countless lives have been lost. Fierce and warlike tribes have had to be conquered. High mountains, where the bones of many an army have been left bleaching, have had to be climbed ; vast steppes, where hunger and starvation have exacted their toll, have had to be crossed ; but with indomitable perseverance this mighty people has moved along the track of fate until it has been consolidated into one of the largest empires in the world.

But it has not been in the battles for conquest that the qualities of the Chinese soldier alone have been displayed. It has been in the sterner conflicts of self-defence that his courage has been most conspicuously shown. The fertile lands, the sunny plains, and the fruitful valleys of this wonderful country have always been looked upon with envy by the warlike races that have lived along its northern and western frontiers. Many a bloody campaign has been fought with the fierce Tartar horsemen that came down in mighty squadrons to invade the land, only to be hurled back again to their own wilds, defeated and dismayed.

There have been times, it is true, when, through the corruption of its mandarins and the incapacity of its emperors, the country has been torn from their grasp, and a foreign dynasty has sat on the Dragon Throne ; but even then the imperial character of the race is shown in their absorption of their conquerors, and in the conversion of them into Chinese. An example of what is meant may be seen in the present Manchu dynasty. Nearly three centuries ago the Tartars overthrew the rulers of China and have ever since held the supreme power in this land. Tartar soldiers as of old still garrison the provincial capitals, and men of the same race hold high appointments, both civil and military, throughout the eighteen provinces, but no one can detect the difference between the two races now. The children of the soldiers that seized the empire are to-day standing side by side with the descendants of the men they conquered, and in dress and in language and in modes of thought they have become identified with the vanquished.

The Chinese Tommy is about as amusing a specimen of the man military as it is possible to conceive and instead of being awed by his appearance, even when in large bodies, one's first impulse is to look upon him with semi-contempt and with a smile upon one's face. No attempt has been made by his officers to give him a smart and soldierlike air. From a Western standpoint, he has never had any drill worth talking about. He is not made to stand erect and throw out his chest, so as to make the most of whatever inches Nature has given him. His soul is never tortured with having to learn the goose step, a very fortunate thing for him, as the raw material out of which Tommies are made in this land has very confused ideas about right and left legs. He is never made to march in step, but is allowed to straggle on with his comrades in the fashion that will best suit his tastes and the villainous roads over which he has to travel.

There is one very offensive thing about the soldier, and that is his want of cleanliness. His superior officers pay no attention generally to the condition either of his clothes or of his person. The result is a perfect indifference to soap and water. He has a grimy, unwashed look, as though he always slept in his uniform and when he rose in the morning had no time either to wash his face or change his untidy, frowsy-looking garments for something more neat and attractive. To add to his utterly unmilitary air, he wears, in the southern provinces at least, neither shoes nor stockings. When he is on the march, he puts on straw sandals to protect his feet, but when he is not on duty he simply adopts the universal custom of the poorer classes and uses the shoes that Nature has given him to wear.

The easy-going nature of the Celestial gets no new impulse by his becoming a "brave," and he is as simple and as childlike as though he had never been appointed to fight his country's battles. It is no uncommon thing for a sentry on duty to be seen crouching down in the favourite national position on his heels, with a gaping crowd around him, who are allowed to handle his rifle whilst he is explaining to them its intricacies and gently hinting his own conviction that after all it is not very much superior to the native jingal, that required less attention and did not deteriorate so much from rust.

The soldier's uniform has evidently never given the Government very much anxiety, for it differs only from the dress of the common people by having the word "brave" written in a loud and staring form on his breast, and also on his back. A man who wishes to disguise himself simply turns his coat inside out, and lo! he is at once transformed into a simple farmer or a workman such as one may meet anywhere in the streets.

This uniform consists merely of a tunic and trousers, both of them baggy and ill-fitting. It would seem, indeed, as though the latter had been designed to enable the Chinese to adopt his favourite but inelegant posture of sitting on the floor with his knees up to his chin, whilst his arms are tightly grasped around them. Ten minutes of this would make an Englishman so cramped and tired that it would become intolerable to him, but a Chinese looks upon it as the very acme of comfort.

It is a most amusing sight to see a detachment of soldiers proceeding on some special duty, and to mark the weapons with which they are equipped. Beside his gun, which each soldier carries with the barrel over his shoulder, he is provided with a fan. That it may not inconvenience him on a march, the handle of it is stuck a short way down his back under his clothes, whilst the other end projects out near one of his ears. If the day be hot, he will spread it out over the top of his head, and wind his queue firmly around the handle, thus keeping it in its place and causing it to act as a shade from the powerful rays of the sun.

Another article of almost equal importance is his bamboo pipe. He would as soon think of leaving his gun behind him as that. It is to be his solace by the way. A few whiffs now and again ease the journey and stay the pangs of hunger when the stage is very long. In order that it may not interfere with the freedom of his hands he sticks it horizontally across his back in his waist-band.

A third very important item is his umbrella. Every soldier who aims at respectability has one. To be without one is to cast a suspicion upon the character of the "brave," and to lead onlookers to believe that he is no better than he ought to be. The practical, matter-of-fact Chinese does not believe that getting wet adds either to his dignity or to his efficiency as a soldier, and though the umbrella is several pounds weight, and is a clumsily made article that can neither be stuck down his back nor thrust into his waistband, he is prepared manfully to carry this extra burden for the sake of the comfort it will give him in case it should rain by the way.

And so the military party passes before us, a burlesque on war played with a solemn face and without a wink ; and yet these men are the veritable descendants of the soldiers and warriors who, disciplined and trained precisely as they are, by their heroism and deeds of daring added province after province to the empire, until to-day it is one of the most extensive in the world.

The entrance to the army is by a public examination in the use of the sword, shield, and bow and arrow, and in the ability to lift heavy weights. A description of a visit to one of these may be interesting. Arrived at the place where the men were to be examined, we found a number of common-looking men lounging about, waiting for the arrival of the examiner. By and by he came, trotting upon a rough, shaggy pony, that looked as if it had never been groomed in its life, and with a long stride, supposed to be highly military, he dropped into a chair that had been placed ready for him. One of the candidates was then ordered, in a loud, peremptory voice, to stand forth and display his skill.

He was a great, burly fellow, dressed in the ordinary blue cotton tunic and baggy trousers. His features were heavy and phlegmatic-looking. Good-humour and density seemed to be the chief characteristics of the man before us. There did not seem to be a spark of fire about him, and the impression we got of him was that he would bolt at the first onslaught of an advancing foe. A sword and a shield were handed to him, and another man, who was supposed to represent the foe, stepped out and confronted him. This man was armed with a longer sword than the recruit, but, as the latter had a shield, he was supposed to have an advantage over his opponent. At a given signal both men stood on guard, and in a moment our recruit had become a new man. The dull look had vanished from his face, his eyes flashed, hidden fires that lay smouldering behind those stolid features lighted up his countenance, and the inert, bovine-looking creature was at once transformed as if by magic into an embryo warrior.

His enemy stepped forward warily and made a lunge at him with the sword. With his body slightly bent, and peering over his shield to catch the first motions of his opponent, the recruit gripped his sword with a nervous grasp and with a rapid movement of his shield stopped the blow that was intended for his body. Before his foe had time to recover himself, he had made a violent pass at him that demanded all his dexterity to avoid. And now both men were glowing with excitement. Each one felt that this was a contest in which the highest skill he possessed must be displayed. Attack and defence followed each other in quick succession, and we were particularly struck with the dexterity with which the recruit used his shield. Now it was in front of him and then down at his feet, as a sudden lunge had been made at his legs. A moment after it covered his side and suddenly it flashed up to defend his head. By and by he advanced to the attack, and then were seen the rapid passes he could make with his sword. Sometimes it struck straight out, then it was trying to cleave his foe, and anon it was making a sudden sweep upwards. We could hardly follow his motions, so swift were they. It would seem, indeed, as though he had forgotten that this was only a mimic fight, and that he felt that his very life depended upon his right use of his weapons. Some parts of this exhibition appeared exceedingly ludicrous to us, but not so to the onlookers. They thought it a splendid exhibition of skill, and repeated exclamations of wonder and delight broke forth from the bystanders at some displays of agility that seemed more consistent with the calling of a mountebank than that of a soldier.

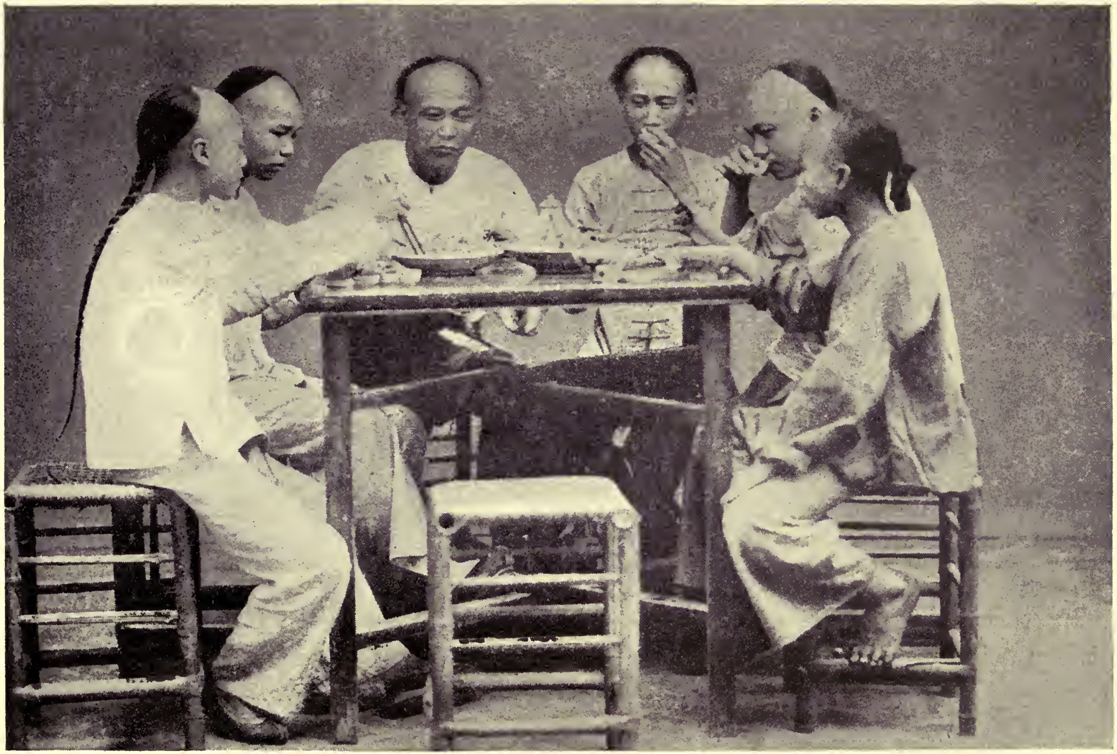
The candidate for military life was next handed a bow and three arrows, and directed to shoot at a target some fifty yards distant. He was lucky enough to send each of them into the bull's-eye. This is required for a pass. If he had failed he would have been dismissed, with the advice to go and practise and come up again when he was more proficient.

The examiner, satisfied with regard to his skill in the management of his weapons, gave him a final trial that would test his physical powers. A number of large stones were lying promiscuously about, and these he was ordered to lift up and move about in various directions. Taking up the smallest, which must have weighed at least fifty pounds, he poised it in the air, and lifted it above his head with the greatest ease, showing that his muscles had been hardened by previous exercise. One by one he took up the larger stones, until at last he was grappling with the heaviest, that was fully one hundred pounds weight. With this he had evidently got to the limit of his strength, for his face was flushed and his body trembled under the violent effort that was required to lift it up to the level of his face. He had proved, however, that his strength was quite sufficient to grapple any ordinary man that he might meet with in battle and to lay him on his back. He was accordingly accepted, and his name was enrolled amongst those of the soldiers of the empire.

The examination above described is still in force throughout China, though lately a knowledge of the rifle has been demanded as well. In the regiments that are drilled after the Western fashion a new system is in force, but these are few in comparison with the large numbers throughout the different provinces that still cling to the methods that have been in use in China from the very earliest times.

After the recruit has been accepted he joins the regiment to which he is appointed, and here he finds few of the comforts and conveniences that await the English soldier after he has enlisted in the service of his country. The barracks usually consist of a series of rooms about twenty-five feet square, each of which accommodates ten men. Five plank beds with a coverlet to keep them warm, a rice pan for cooking, bowls and chopsticks, several small tables, and the requisite number of wooden forms, make up the furniture of the room. The severest simplicity marks these soldiers' quarters, only what is absolutely necessary for daily use being provided by the Government.

The soldier's pay is about fourteen shillings a month, out of which he has to provide himself both with food and any luxuries that he may wish to indulge in. Excepting during times when he is required for reviews and



AT DINNER.

for special services he is his own cook, the ten men taking it in turns to prepare the food for the rest. When he is off duty the Chinese soldier is very free from any vexatious supervision by his officers. There is no inspection of quarters, and no question about the cleanliness either of himself or of his clothes. He is at perfect liberty to wash every day if he chooses, and he has equal liberty to abstain from doing so for months at a time, a privilege of which he not infrequently takes advantage. As for a bath, if he were to ask for one there would be such a roar of laughter throughout the regiment that the echoes would never die out of his ears as long as he was with the colours.

When the men are on the march they are supplied with food in addition to their pay, and this is provided by the authorities along the route. A memorandum is forwarded of the number of men that may be expected at certain stopping-places, and the necessary quantities of rice, salt fish, salted turnips, and bean-curd cakes are all ready for the hungry men, who at once set to with a will to cook the things that have been provided for them.

The march of a body of soldiers is always dreaded by the shopkeepers along the route, especially when the men are on their way to meet the enemy. Discipline, which is never very strict, is then greatly relaxed. The men are going to imperil their lives for the safety of their country, and it seems to them that a little licence may be allowed as a kind of solace to their feelings for the dangers they are about to incur. The shops, therefore, are laid under contribution as they pass along, and no one dares use any force to protect their property against these valiant defenders of their country. On one occasion, a thousand men started from a certain city—hatless ; when they arrived at another, twenty miles farther on, every man had a brand new hat, for which no payment had ever been made.

On the arrival of the soldiers at a place where there are no barracks, they are usually quartered in the largest of the idol temples. No one sees any impropriety in this ; in fact, it is supposed to be a very proper thing, for they come then under the immediate care of the gods, who are now bound to use all their power to secure them victory when they come into contact with the enemy. Whatever opinion the troops may have on this subject, they certainly do not pay much respect to the gods whilst they are inmates of their temples. They smoke opium and play cards, and swear and quarrel with each other right in the very presence of the gods. They litter the building, too, with all kinds of dirt, so that, after a day or two's residence, they leave it in the most filthy condition possible.

Their presence in any place is always a source of terror to its inhabitants. As very often happens, the mandarins, in providing rations for the troops, make their own squeezes out of the business, and supply them with insufficient or inferior provisions. The soldiers dare not appeal to their commissariat officer, for they would receive the severest punishment for even hinting at the fact that the authorities had been making money out of them. The only course left to them is to revenge themselves upon the people who are quite guiltless in the matter. A foray is accordingly proposed by some of the bolder spirits amongst the men, and by and by the quietest quarters of the town are startled by seeing chickens with outstretched wings and open mouths flying in terror before half a dozen wild-looking soldiers. Small and succulent-looking pigs mysteriously disappear, and their mistresses make their usual meal call cries, but in vain, for they never wander back to their homes again. Fruit and cakes and various kinds of delicacies are bought on credit, without the consent of their owners, with the promise that they will be paid on the morrow, a day, however, that never comes round. Later on, savoury odours rise throughout the temples and wind their unseen ways around the wondering idols, causing the mouths of the uncouth soldiery to water and their eyes to sparkle with delight in expectation of the coming feast.

The officers in the army are mainly those that have risen from the ranks, though it is possible for men by passing their examination to get their commissions. The subjects are the same that the common soldier is examined in ; but when a man goes in for a higher rank the trials are made more difficult, and a higher standard of efficiency is demanded. There must also be a certain amount of bribing to secure the goodwill of the examining official. The officers, however, that are most respected and at the same time most feared are the men who have been distinguished for their daring in front of the enemy, and who have won their rank by such soldierly conduct as will gain the homage of the men they command. Nearly every officer who has risen to high position has done so by the display of conspicuous courage and by such military talents as have compelled his superior officers to recognise his ability.

Some years ago, the general commanding the troops in the region where the writer lives was an example of this. When he was a young man he was wild and dissipated. He refused to be bound by the restraints of home, or submit to the ordinary rules of society, so that he was surely drifting into that wretched state of vagabondism that would have ultimately landed him in the ranks of thieves and rogues. In a happy moment it occurred to him that it would be a good thing for him were he to join the army. War was then going on with the savages in Formosa, and men were wanted to supplement the forces there. He was looked upon as a most acceptable recruit. He was a finely-made man, with huge physical powers, and just the one to stand before the sudden onslaught of the wild men of the island, who with dishevelled hair and ferocious aspect were accustomed to rush out from their ambuscades in the primeval forests and carry off the gory heads of slaughtered Chinese to their fortresses in the mountains.

Lin was not left long to ponder over the step he had taken. In a few days he was sent off with a detachment across the stormy waters of the Formosa Channel, and he landed on the island unconscious that here his fortunes were to be made and his vagabond life to be exchanged for one of honour and renown. His bravery was so conspicuous that he was speedily raised to the command of ten men.

Not long after he had been promoted there was a fierce conflict with the savages. Large numbers of them had emerged from the forest and had come down like lightning upon the Chinese troops, who had been compelled to give way. Lin, who was carrying the flag of his company, found himself retiring before the enemy, when all at once he discovered that in the mêlée he had lost his sword. This meant disgrace and loss of rank, and possibly even death itself when the matter was reported to the General. Better die now, he thought, honourably, than by the hands of the executioner. At all hazards he must regain his sword, so without a moment's thought he rushed back right into the midst of the pursuing enemy, and his men not knowing the reason, but seeing the flag waving in the direction of the foe, with the instinct of discipline rushed back after their leader. The savages were thunderstruck. They had considered that the Chinese were utterly routed. These must be the reserves, they thought, that were being brought up against them. A panic seized upon them, and in an instant the victorious foe was flying in the wildest disorder before the Chinese forces. After the fight was over, Lin was called before the General, who, in the presence of his staff, eulogised the bravery that had been the cause of the victory and promoted him to a higher rank. In course of time he rose from one grade to another until finally he was put in command of the troops in a large and important military district.

The Chinese soldier, as he is at present constituted and handled, is not one for whom any one can have a profound admiration. His military education has been such as to draw out his very worst qualities. His want of bravery is due rather to circumstances than to any inherent defect in his own nature. It is impossible to conceive the idea that China has risen to be a first-rate Eastern power, whilst its people have been absolutely deficient in animal courage. What the soldier in this land needs is properly trained men of undoubted courage to lead him, and to be surrounded by higher and more chivalrous influences than those that touch him in his barrack life. General Gordon showed how the raw material could be developed into soldiers who by their valour and success merited the high-sounding title of "The Ever Victorious Army."

The Weihaiwei regiment showed by its conduct at the capture of Tientsin from the Boxers of what stuff the Chinese are made. The *North-China Herald*, of September 5, 1900, in referring to the battle in which the regiment took part, says: "There has been a great deal of prejudice against the regiment, largely born of the conviction in many minds that the Chinese are no good as soldiers. Certainly these prejudices do not appear to have been justified so far. They fought bravely and well under the walls of Tientsin. Let it be remembered that they fought with our troops, and on the side of civilisation and humanity at a time when these abstractions had few friends amongst the Chinese.

"It has often been remarked that the Chinese only need leaders, and the brief history of the Weihaiwei regiment confirms this judgment. When men will follow their officers up a long, straight street swept by bullets, as No. 4 Company followed Captain Watson, they cannot be hopeless as soldiers. The regiment that can furnish a man to escort an ammunition mule to the firing-line, who will hold on to his charge, whilst both officers and mule are shot, only to perish himself, is not an altogether useless regiment. Europeans who saw the conduct of this man after Captain Ollivant had been killed speak of a merited Victoria Cross."

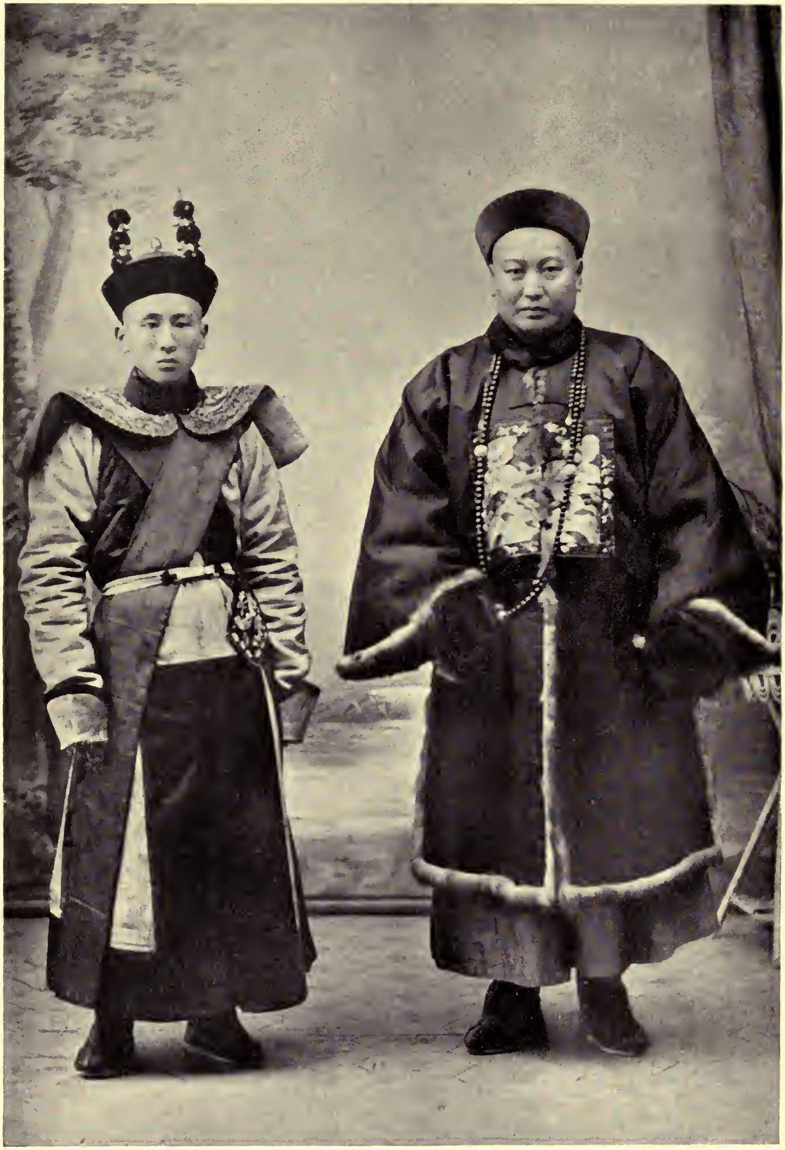
In the preceding pages I have endeavoured to describe the Chinese soldier of the empire. It is true that a certain number of regiments have been drilled and organised in Western methods. One who is not acquainted with the true facts of the case is apt to imagine that a completely new system has been brought into operation wherever the soldier may be found. This is a mistake. There are vast regions in this great country where the soldier remains practically unchanged. The men that have been winning the battles in the present revolution have been mainly those who have never been trained in the new system. A vision of freedom from their hated conquerors has come as a tremendous inspiration, and so they have fought with a daring and a courage that have brought victory to their standards. The new Republic will see to it that its soldiers shall be so trained that they will be able to defend the honour of their country before all comers.

CHAPTER IV

LITERARY DEGREES

It has always been the dream and hope of nearly every father in China that when a son is born in the family he shall one day become a scholar. This is an ambition that seems to spring up in his heart with the coming of the child that has brought such sunshine into his home. The poorest can indulge in this luxury of thought just as freely as the wealthiest, for in China the possibilities of wealth and honour lie not within the grasp of any particular class of society. The student class is recruited from every station of life, excepting those prohibited by law. The sons of prostitutes, of play actors, of barbers and a few others, may not compete for any degree. Beyond these, any man may rise to the highest honours that the State can confer, for in theory, at least, the one royal road to distinction is education.

The civil rulers of the country must be taken from the scholars of the empire, and when it is considered how many of these are required to carry on the official duties of this immense country, it may easily be conceived what an influential and powerful class they are. The undergraduates who have failed in getting their degrees are, of course, exceedingly numerous, and though they have no official position, they still exercise a very considerable influence in their own immediate districts. They are the teachers in the schools and the leading spirits in the villages. Their education places them far above the common people, and in times of difficulties with the rulers, or in their village feuds and class fights, they are the men whose counsel is sought and who, naturally, assume the position of leaders. As they band together for mutual protection into



A MANDARIN AND HIS SON, WHO HAS JUST TAKEN HIS B.A.

To face p. 53.

associations, they are a very dangerous class to come into collision with, for each man has not only the club to which he belongs behind him, but also the men of his own clan, who will stand by him through thick and thin, with all the resources they have at their command. Taken as a whole, they are a very unscrupulous body of men. Their wits have been sharpened by their studies, whilst their moral sense seems to have been paralysed during the process. They are the mortal foes of progress, and they are the bitterest and most inveterate haters of the foreigner, no matter to what nationality he may belong.

There were four degrees given to successful scholars in China: (1) *siutsai*, "refined talent"; (2) *kujên*, "exalted man"; (3) *tsinsze*, "advanced scholar"; and (4) *hanlin*, that is, a member of the Imperial Academy at Peking. The first is obtained at the examinations held in the prefectural city to which the candidate belongs, the second in the provincial capital, and the last two at Peking. In the final one, the Emperor himself is the examiner.

The scholarship that has been demanded to gain any of the above degrees is, from a Western standpoint, very meagre and limited in character, and would be considered ridiculously small to our students in England. All that has been required of them is a profound knowledge of the Confucian classics. The elementary subjects that every boy has to study in our advanced schools, to say nothing of the higher branches that are taught in our universities, were quite unknown to the Chinese student. Mathematics, astronomy, geometry, geology, &c., are terms that were almost unknown to him, and as for the purely scientific subjects that our young men and women have to study, they had not yet entered the horizon of the scholar's life in this country.

It must not be inferred from this that the course of study that had to be gone through by the Chinese student has been an easy one. In many respects it has been a more severe one than the English lad has to go through. He had to learn all the classics off by heart, together with their recognised commentaries. The subjects are often crabbed, and always more or less dry and uninteresting. They do not deal with human life, but with abstract, moral, and philosophical questions. There is no play for real thought, and there is no education of the imagination by the study of Nature. The whole thing is a hard grind, first of all to master the thousands of mysterious-looking hieroglyphs in which the books have been written, and then to store them away in the memory so that every word and phrase in the entire book shall be so familiar that the student shall be able to quote them accurately whenever occasion demands. No English student could stand the wear and tear and frightful pressure upon both body and mind involved in these two things. How many a Chinese scholar has broken down under this awful strain and has been laid to rest on the hillside, while the coveted honours were still in the distance, only those who have studied this question can even attempt to imagine.

For the examination for the first degree there were four subjects in which a man had to pass, viz., a poem either in fives or sevens and not exceeding sixty words ; a metrical composition of irregular metre, describing some famous building or object in ancient times ; a double-barrelled essay on some quotation from the classics ; and a discourse on any prominent subject, either of ancient or modern times, that the examiner may see fit to choose.

The subjects for the poem were of a suggestively poetical character, and were such as would touch into life the latent imagination, and cause it to burst forth into poetry. The following were themes which have been given in bygone examinations, and which have been treated so beautifully and with such a true poetic spirit running through them that they have been printed and are studied as models by the scholars of the country : "Where is the bell that I hear sounding amongst the lofty mountains?" that is, the bell from some monastery, perched on the side of some lonely mountain and whose sweet sounds break upon the ear in the solitude of some lofty range. "The parting of friends at Nanpau," referring to an incident in the life of a famous mandarin when he was leaving the district, over which he had ruled, for his distant home. "The emerald wavelets of the spring waters," in reference to the waters that come tumbling down the mountain-sides after the spring rains, and their emerald sheen caught from the sun as they rush headlong down to the plain below ; " The singing of the birds in spring " ; " The spring pomegranate," &c.

Many of the poetical compositions have the ring of genuine poetry about them. They show a wonderful insight into Nature, and they contain lofty flights of imagination that would do credit to some of the famous poets of the West. This is all the more wonderful, as the Chinese at first sight looks like a man in whose soul no poetic fire has ever burned. With his dull, phlegmatic look and rough, unpoetic features, one would as soon expect an exquisite description of some charming bit of Nature from an old cow or a rhinoceros.

The Celestial, however, is a many-sided man, and possesses talent and resources that one would never dream of from his stolid, inartistic looks. He has, moreover, a genuine love of Nature, and an eye quick to perceive her charms, and he seems to be endowed with a special instinct to discover the beautiful in her, and with true poetic language to reveal to others the beauties that she coyly hides from those who have not the artistic eye.

For the metrical composition the subjects selected were by no means poetical in their character, but they must follow certain well-defined laws of metre, after the Martin Tupper style, which should take away their prose appearance and give them the semblance of having been written by some genius in the art of rhyming that will ere long bud out into a full-blossomed poet. The following are the subjects that have been given by examiners in the past : " Describe the famous palace of Shih Huangti, the first Emperor of China." " Give a description of the brass peacock platform raised during the period of the three kingdoms." This celebrated platform was built by one of the usurpers during the troubles that distracted China at the time when the country was divided amongst three rival competitors (A.D. 221-65), in order to enable him to see over a long reach of country so that he might be made aware of the coming of an enemy. Another subject that was once given is "The Pomegranate in the Palace." This was a celebrated tree that, during the Han dynasty, three times a day drooped its leaves as though it had gone to sleep and three times raised them again as though refreshed by its nap.

The subjects of the essay were taken from the classics, and a man could either deal with them critically or he could evolve his own ideas from them. The following have been selected from former examination papers: "Hungry and thirsty"; "Is it not pleasant to have friends come from afar?"; "Is virtue a thing remote?"; "I wish to be virtuous and lo! virtue is close to me"; "Sincerity is the way of heaven"; "Let compassion rule punishment."

The discourse was of a more general nature and dealt with a wider range of subjects, stretching away, indeed, into the remote past and coming down to the events of the present day. One of the subjects that was selected in days gone by was the following: "Give an account of the burning of the classics by Shih Huangti." This refers to the determined purpose of that famous monarch to eradicate every vestige of the sacred books out of the kingdom, so that they could never be studied again. He was influenced to this action because the scholars, who were imbued with the teachings of these books, had been his bitter opponents in the reforms he wished to carry out in his newly-formed empire. Another subject was, "Describe the Great Wall of China, and give an account of railways and iron ships of war." This last shows the tendency of the reforms that the present Emperor Kuang Su initiated in 1898 and into what new paths the imperial Examiners were led by this distinguished occupant of the Dragon Throne.

To write out these essays and discourses there must be a very thorough knowledge of every word contained in the classics, as well as of those in the recognised commentaries on them. This in itself was a most gigantic task, and would crack the brain of any one but a Celestial. Each character had to be learned by itself, for it is a complete picture with a foreground and background uniquely its own, and it had to be studied and mastered as though it were the only one in the language. No mistake was allowed here. A misquotation or the writing of a character wrongly would cause the composition to be at once thrown aside by the Examiner and deprive the candidate of all hope of getting his degree.

Just imagine five or six thousand of those square little words, with an old-world look upon their faces as though they had come out of the Ark. They are as dry and as sober as though they were mathematical figures, and yet each one has its story hidden behind those complicated dots and strokes. The student has to penetrate within these, and with busy memory catch the fleeting forms that flit behind them, and piece out the tale of love and hate, of passion and murder, of human frailties and noble purposes that lies concealed within the folds of those mystic symbols. This in itself is a task enough for a giant to perform.

When the student had accomplished this, the task yet to be performed was still a mighty one. The whole of the sacred books had to be committed to memory, and the meaning of all the words and phrases, that were written nearly three thousand years ago, to be mastered so as to satisfy the conservative ideas of the Examiners who had the power of conferring degrees.

A first-rate Chinese scholar is a prodigious monument of the survival of brain and intellect after such a strain as all this imposes. The books themselves are on the whole the dryest of the dry. Human life has been squeezed out of them as much as possible by the old philosophers and thinkers, who do not seem to have had a very lofty conception of ordinary and common humanity. Their style is curt and sententious, as though the men that wrote them had either never studied the art of composition or were too busy to go into details. There is neither romance nor excitement in them. Noble sentiments and the highest morality flash across their pages, but the teaching is too much divorced from common life. We long to hear the voices of men and women and the laughter of children and the sound of the human voice, but we never do. How different was the method that Christ adopted! His discourses are full of life, and men and women pass before our view, and crowds flit before us, and human joys and sorrows are portrayed in language so simple that we feel as though we were moving amid the very scenes that are so vividly pictured before us.

In the second degree for *kujên* the subjects were the same as for the first, the only difference being that to obtain the more advanced degree a more chaste and classical style of composition and a more profound knowledge of different subjects were demanded by the Examiners. The examination for this degree was held in the capital of the province. As many of the provinces are of considerable extent, it often happened that some of the men had to travel two or three hundred miles before they could reach the city. Considering the bad roads and the difficulty of locomotion, that meant steady walking every day for nearly a month. But independent of the mere physical labour involved in this there was what is of far more importance to the scholar, viz., the question of expense. The most of the men were as poor as Job or the proverbial church mouse, and so it became a vast problem to the majority of them how they were to scrape together enough to pay for their food and lodging whilst they were away from home.

Many stories are told of the sufferings that these men had to endure in their struggle for fame who subsequently became distinguished in the annals of their country. An incident that took place in connection with a steep and rugged hill that lies right across the public highway in a certain district in South China has perpetuated the memory of one of these. The story goes that a long time ago a very poor graduate had gone up to the provincial capital to be examined for his second degree. He had painfully struggled over the two hundred miles that lay between his hamlet and the city where his fortunes lay. He was a man of a brave heart and strong, robust constitution, and so, with indomitable perseverance, he travelled over mountains and across streams and wound his way over populous plains till at last he had reached his destination.

His finances by this time had become very low, but he had just enough to enable him to scrape through the nine days that the examination lasted. When these were over his last cash had been spent and he was left in the great city, where he did not know a soul, absolutely penniless. Chinese benevolence to strangers, a virtue highly extolled in the classics, is conspicuous by its absence in ordinary common life. The man did not dream of despairing, however, for he was a plucky, determined fellow, and, though a man of great ability, he was not ashamed to put his hand to any honest work, no matter how mean it might be. He accordingly arranged with one of the sedan-chair shops to carry a customer that was returning to his own district. Chair-bearers have a distinctly bad reputation everywhere in China, and consequently it showed the brave and independent spirit of the man that he should be willing to descend from his position as one of the gentry to become, for the time being, one of this despised class.

The scholar had carried his fare fully one hundred and fifty miles, up the sides of hills and along the edges of ravines and across crowded plains, his mind all the time full of anxious surmisings as to how the examinations had turned out and whether his own name was amongst the lucky ones or not. He had not had funds enough to allow him to stay in the city long enough to wait for the issue by the Examiners of the names of the men that had passed. By this time his shoulders were swollen and blistered with the hard bamboo poles that had rested upon them so long, and life began to wear a very gloomy aspect to him. He had just come to the foot of a high and steep hill, and as he cast his eyes up to it, it took his breath away to think that he had to climb that with the weight of the heavy chair pressing him to the ground. At that moment he heard behind him the clanging of the gongs of the "Bringers of good news," who were hurrying along at a rapid rate, calling out the names of the lucky men who had succeeded in passing their examinations. "Bringers of good news" are a class of men that get their living in connection with the examinations. No sooner are the names of the successful candidates put out by the Examiners than they hasten off by forced marches to distant homes and inform the relatives of the honours that their friends have gained. They are easily recognised, for they usually travel in companies of four, and have gongs which they now and again strike, whilst they shout out the names of the men who have gained their degrees.

As these men drew nearer, he caught the sound of his own name, and as he listened with anxious, throbbing heart, he heard them tell how that not only had he passed, but that he actually stood the first on the list, and that therefore he was to-day the leading scholar in the whole of the province. He was overcome with gladness, for wealth and honours were now certainly within his grasp, and poverty and suffering were about to vanish out of his life. Letting down the sedan-chair to the ground, he said, "I shall carry no more chairs." His fare reminded him of his engagement to carry him to his journey's end. After some little demur he agreed to do so, on the condition that an extra sum should be paid to him for the stiff hill he was about to face. This was agreed to, and the man with double-first honours raised the poles to his blistered shoulders, and, with a spring in his tread and a song in his heart, he mounted the hill as though he had been a common coolie and not a scholar whose fame would soon be ringing throughout the province, and whose name would be posted up in every school and in every undergraduate's home, not only throughout his own province, but also in every province in the empire. In memory of this famous incident, the chair-bearers from that time to this drop their chairs at the foot of this hill, and refuse to proceed any farther until a certain sum has been promised them, in addition to their stipulated fare.

The third and fourth degrees were obtained in Peking. Those who passed in these, and especially in the last, had an honourable career before them, and were capable of obtaining the most lucrative posts in the empire. Whatever may have been the position from which the men came originally, the fact that they had passed these examinations placed them at once in the forefront of the aristocracy of China, and the man that came out first in the fourth would probably become a Viceroy of two provinces, where he would have almost regal powers over a population of forty or fifty millions of people.

But a new spirit is flashing through the Empire, and the blood that is coursing through its veins no longer travels to the slow tune of the vanished centuries. Like Rip Van Winkle, the long, deep sleep of the ages is over. The old scenes have passed away, and the vision that the eyes of the young men and women are gazing upon to-day will never permit them to go back to the rôle of the past.

The books and themes that were sufficient for their fathers have lost their charm. A thousand voices from Western lands have come with the thrilling melody of a new song, and their echoes are flying across the great plains and over the loftiest mountains and down the deep valleys, and a new conception of life is awakening in the souls of the people such as their greatest poets could never sing to them. The first notes of the song of the coming age are just being heard, and the dreams that had seemed to have for ever died in their hearts are once more fashioning their wonderful imagery in them.

Government schools have been established all over the empire, and the young lads are crowding into them. The mystery of Western thought has touched their imagination, whilst new continents that China never explored in the past are now looming up before their astonished gaze.

A new era has indeed dawned upon China. The great Examination Halls, where often ten thousand men sat for their examinations, stand solitary and forsaken. Their glory has departed. Their doors swing on their hinges at the bidding of wandering winds. Great spiders spin their webs from their ceilings, and the weird sounds that moan through them, one can imagine, are the sighs of the great men that won their fame in them, and whose spirits are mourning over the departed glories of the empire.

CHAPTER V

THE CHINESE CLASSICS

THIS chapter deals with a subject that is a most ancient one, and yet it is a thoroughly modern one, for though the nation is beginning to turn its gaze to Western lands and to the future for its ideals, it is an undoubted fact that the classics of China still exercise a profound and most dominating influence on both learned and unlearned throughout the country.

In discussing them, I have endeavoured to place before my readers the position they occupy in the estimation of the thinkers and scholars of to-day. That has hardly changed at all from what it has always been, and so I feel justified in using the present tense in describing their history and teaching.

These famous classics have always been considered to be the sacred books of the Chinese, though not by any means in a theological sense. Some foreign writers have even called them the Bible of China, though that is giving them an honour that the Chinese themselves have never assigned to them.

They never profess to give any answer to some of the great problems that arise in men's hearts, neither do they throw any light whatever on the great question of the future. The vast majority of the Chinese people, being unable to read, never look into their pages or consult them on moral questions. Even the scholars who know every word of them by heart have not found them to meet the needs of their spiritual life. I have known large numbers of these, and I have never met with any of them who did not have their family idols in their homes, which they worshipped just as the common and the most illiterate of the people. They are not religious books, in our sense of the term, and are not looked upon as containing a divine revelation. They contain an ethical system that has had a tremendous influence in giving the Chinese high ideals of goodness and morality. It is in consequence of this that they stand pre-eminent in the estimation of the people of the Middle Kingdom.

Other books in very large numbers abound in China, dealing with a great variety of subjects, but not one amongst them has the prestige or the authority of the classics. These are the books that are held in more than royal honour by every member of society; by the farmer that follows the plough, and who had only a glimpse into them when he was a lad; by the coolie that earns his daily bread by the severest toil, and who could not read a line in them, were it to save his life, as well as by the most brilliant scholar in the land, who has risen to fame and honour by his study of them. There is a sense in which these books have permeated the nation and captured the mind and the imagination of all classes, in such a way as never has been done hitherto, excepting, perhaps, by the Bible, in any country outside of China. We need not be surprised at this, when we consider what they have been to the Chinese people. For nearly twenty centuries they have been the only educational books the nation has ever used. No others have been allowed to compete with them.

It has been accepted as an axiomatic truth by generation after generation that there were no other books that had ever been produced that were so fit to become the school books of the nation as these. More than a thousand years ago, the little Chinese boys woke up at daybreak, rubbed their eyes, and caught sight of the dim light that was chasing the shadows out of the room. They must be up at once, for the school doors are open, and the teacher is waiting for them, and the sunbeams are beginning to glance through the village, and to dart among the trees and to light up with a touch of gold the dreary walls of the schoolroom. The thought of the master's face with its stern frown, and eyes out of which no sympathetic flash ever subdued the hard, severe look in them, brings them with a jump out of bed, and in a few minutes they are on their way to the school. The distant hill-tops stand out brightly in the light they have caught from the rising sun, but the plain is still in that dreamy, undefined state that has been left by the lingering shadows of the past night, that seem loath to disappear before the new day.

As the lads hurry on to the school, others emerge from narrow footpaths, and from under the spreading banyan that is beginning to flash under the touch of the morning sunbeams that seem to be making love to it, and soon the dreary old schoolhouse rings with the sound of a score of voices raised to their highest pitch.

Now the books put into children's hands are the classics. These are dry-looking and atrociously printed, and with not a single picture to enliven the pages throughout the whole range of them. For the first four or five years' study of them, the lads have not the remotest idea of what they mean, and the teacher never attempts to explain them. They are as profound as Plato would be to an English lad were his writings handed to him in the original Greek, and he were left to puzzle out the sound of the words in which they were written.

Now, the schoolboys of to-day are going through precisely the same routine that their predecessors did ten centuries ago. There has been absolutely no change either in the books or in the method in which they are studied. No school boards have ever met and decided that they have become antiquated, and must be supplanted by others more modern and up-to-date. No hint of such a thing has ever been breathed by a living soul. To propound such a heresy would set the nation into a frenzy of ferment, and send rebellion into the heart of every student and thinker in the land.

But it is not simply in the elementary schools that these books have reigned supreme, undisturbed by educational boards or authorities. They still stand alone without a rival in the higher education of the country. The scholar is never supposed to grow out of them. There never comes a time when, with a sigh of relief, he throws away the dog-eared books that have caused him many a heartache, and says,

" Now I have finished with you for ever, I am thankful to say." No, the very same books that he worried over as a lad, and that he spent weary hours over as a student, are the very same that by and by he will be examined in when he goes up for his different degrees. It will be his knowledge, too, of these identical books that will raise him to honour, and place him on the bench, and if he is very lucky enthrone him in a Viceroy's palace, with a power that is almost absolute in the provinces over which he may be sent to rule.

It is no wonder that these books are sacred to the Chinese. They are not like the primers and readers that are tossed aside and looked upon with a semi-contempt when the man has been transformed into the learned scholar. They will go with him to the very end of life. Others may be read as a matter of amusement, but for thought and study and elevation of mind, and for high ideals there is no book that in his imagination can take the place of the classics.

These famous works consist of nine books, which are known by scholars by the technical term of, " The Four Books and the Five Classics," and in our description of them, we shall follow the order given them by the Chinese. The first in interest and importance of the Four Books is the Analects, or Table Talk of Confucius. It is made up of the wise and shrewd sayings of this distinguished sage, which were collected by his disciples after his death. As might have been expected from its very title, this book deals with a great variety of subjects, many of which are introduced by inquiring disciples who are either anxious to have their minds enlightened about certain abstruse subjects concerning which they are perplexed, or who wish to have the sage's opinions regarding some well-known individuals who were prominent in society at that time.

It is in these conversations that Confucius laid down principles that not only showed the greatness of his own mind, but which also have so appealed to the countless generations of Chinese, that they have served to mould the national thought, and to give the nation the lofty ideals that to-day are held by all classes of people. The whole of his teachings may be said to be condensed into about half a dozen pages or so, that contained the germ thoughts of his system. Around these cluster as their outgrowth the ideals and purposes and springs of noble action of the whole Chinese race, for it is to my mind an undoubted fact that the excellences or defects of the moral, social, or political condition of the Chinese of to-day may, in a very large measure, be traced back to this sage and semi-divine hero of the past. An examination of a few of these words will prove, I believe, the truth of this statement. And the first that I shall select is the word "Heaven." For some reason or other, Confucius was shy of using the word "God," which the older sages who preceded him were fond of employing. The word "Heaven" had a fascination for him, though from his own sayings, it is manifest that he never entirely broke away from some of the great thoughts associated with God. No doubt the idea of his personality suffered a considerable eclipse, though he transferred to his new term some of the great attributes that belonged to God. Heaven was always more to him than a merely material force, that knew nothing of the joys and struggles of mankind. He ever felt that he was under the constant supervision of Heaven, and he was content, though men ignored him and his teaching, if he were approved of by it.

On one occasion, when cast down by the thought that his lifework had not been a success, he said to one of his disciples, "No one understands me." "What do you mean by saying that no one understands you?" was the prompt reply. Still with his thoughts oppressed with the sense of failure, he replied, but rather to himself than to the question of his follower, "I have no grievance against Heaven,[1] and I have no fault to find with men. My studies lie amongst common things, but my thoughts rise high, and my comfort is that Heaven understands me." Heaven to him, moreover, was the Great Power that reigned in the domain of morals, and to come under its displeasure was to put man in a most sorry condition, as there was no appeal against its decision. He has declared in a sentence that has imbedded itself in the life and thought of the Chinese, that when a man sins against Heaven there is none in the wide universe to whom he can appeal beside.

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[1] The word "Heaven" in Chinese is composed of two words which mean "great" and "one." Heaven, then, is the Great One.

The dropping of God was most unfortunate, and has had wider consequences than he ever dreamed of at the time. The results have been most disastrous from a religious point of view. The knowledge of God has almost entirely disappeared from amongst the people, and Heaven, impersonal and undefined, has usurped his place. It is quite true that certain attributes that can only belong to God are ascribed to it. Life and death, disaster and happiness, princely rank and the beggar's lot are all apportioned out by it. Men may scheme and devise and plot, but whether they shall succeed or be thwarted lies with Heaven to decide. In spite of this belief, however, Heaven is only the great vast dome above, which rights wrong, it may be, but which never sheds a tear and never feels a throb of pity for human sorrow and disaster. There is no question but that Confucius, by his frequent use of the word Heaven, which he never attempted to define, as well as by his advice to his disciples to be very chary of having anything to do with spiritual beings, has been the means of leading the scholars and thinkers of China to be largely atheistic in their discussion of religious questions.

Another conspicuous word in the writings of Confucius is the one that means "filial piety." It would be quite impossible for any one who has not been brought up in China to comprehend how this great virtue has saturated Chinese society through the teaching of this famous sage. If one were to ask what special feature there was that marked Chinese life, and what duty there was that was most severely demanded from the high and low, rich and poor alike, one could unhesitatingly answer that it was the honour that is ungrudgingly given to parents by their children.

In travelling along the great thoroughfares of China, one is continually coming upon magnificent arches, costing hundreds of dollars, that have been erected in honour of some son in the neighbourhood who had been distinguished for his reverence for his parents. No virtue is more highly esteemed, and no failure in any duty is more severely condemned than any shortcoming in this. Confucius did a splendid work when, in his conception of the home, he laid down the principle that reverence for parents was absolutely essential not only for its own stability but also for that of the empire. The Chinese nation has accepted this thought as though it were a divine revelation.

Another conception of Confucius was a stroke of genius when, in a moment of inspiration, he drew the picture of the ideal man, whom he distinguishes by the name of "The Son of a king." This man is a person of lofty principles, that dominate and regulate his life. He never acts against the law of love,[1] not even in moments of confusion and danger. He never does a mean or ignoble action, for the atmosphere in which he dwells is goodness.

The figure of this ideal man is rendered all the more striking by the picture that is given of another, who is called "The mean man." This latter is the very reverse in conduct and aim to the Son of a king, and acts as the shadow in the background to set forth his virtues and perfections. This noble conception has done royal service to the nation by the exquisite picture it has given of the exalted life that every man should strive to lead. The students of every age, in the mastering of the classics, have been compelled to study this ideal minutely and to scan every lineament of his features, so that his portrait has been stereotyped upon the brain and thought of the nation. The successive generations of men have no doubt fallen far below the ideal that the Son of a king represents, but it is quite safe to say that the nation would have descended still lower had there been no such picture, drawn by the hand of genius, to supply, in however small a measure, the loss that the nation had suffered by the serious eclipse of God from its thought.

There are two other words that had a magnetic attraction for Confucius, and around which he threw the halo of a master mind. The first of these was "Loyalty." And the Chinese have caught the inspiration of the word, and often has it stirred the sluggish surface of the nation's heart, and liberated the fires that were slumbering and smouldering below. What romances in real life have there not been because of the chivalrous ideas that it has started into life! Men have stood before the foe with a thousand odds against them and never flinched nor thought of fight. Many a soldier has stood behind the walls of a beleaguered fort, and at the bidding of this magic word that could conjure up such heroic thoughts, he has borne the stress of fierce assault and slow, lingering starvation, rather than surrender. One man in ancient times gave his life for an expiring dynasty, and succeeding ages, stirred by the story of his heroism, made him a god, and to-day he is worshipped throughout the length and breadth of the land, because he was loyal to his sovereign.

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[1] See Analects Book 4, chap. 5.

The next word that had a fascination for Confucius was "Sincerity," a very beautiful one, but hardly such as one might have expected to be occupying such a lofty position in the ethics of the nation. That the Chinese look upon it with profound respect is undoubted. Whenever I have had occasion to appeal to it, when some question of truthfulness was at stake, the effect was instantaneous. The eyes sparkled as if a sudden light had flashed into them, and the hard look on the face softened down. The mystic influence of a thought uttered more than twenty centuries ago by the great sage touched something in the heart that vibrated at once to the spell that was laid upon it. Confucius declares that he does not understand how any man who is untruthful can exist. It is a supreme mystery to him. He also lays down the great doctrine that sincerity is the royal way by which Heaven itself continually travels, and that no man's nature can be fully developed that is deficient in this virtue. As the sage continues to discuss the question he seems to rise in his conception of the man who is controlled by sincerity, for he finally asserts that he becomes the very equal of Heaven and indeed is himself a god.

The second of the Four Books is called "The Great Learning," and deals with the cultivation of the individual, the proper management of a family, the government of a feudal State and the ruling of an empire. The purpose of the book is thus expressed in its opening chapter:[1] "The men of ancient times, who wished that virtue should prevail throughout the nation, first saw to the proper regulation of their own States. Planning the proper regulation of their own States, they first controlled their own families. Desiring to control their own families, they first attended to the purification of their own hearts. Aiming at purifying their own hearts, they first sought to be sincere. Wishing to be sincere, they enlarged their knowledge. Desiring to enlarge their knowledge, they examined into the nature of things." It is then shown that any man who has gone persistently and honestly through these various processes must in the end come out a successful ruler, not only of his own small kingdom, his home, but also of the larger one that lies outside of it. The subsequent chapters of this book mainly consist of the wise and pithy sayings of kings and famous men, in order to enforce the teachings laid down in the above quotation.

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[1] See Analects, chap. 2, sec. 22, Doctrine of the Mean, 20, 18, 22, 31, 3.

The third of the Four Books is termed "The Doctrine of the Mean," and was composed, it is believed, by a grandson of Confucius. It is a most elaborate and abstruse work, and its great object is to discuss the nature of virtue, as exemplified in the person of the ideal man, the Son of a king.

The fourth and last of the Four Books consists of the writings of Mencius[1] and deals very largely with the question as to how rulers may best govern their people in accordance with justice and righteousness. Mencius, in common with Confucius, was no believer in the divine rights of kings, for he held that a bad monarch might be deprived of his throne, that his power might be given to a virtuous one. The virtues of love and righteousness had a special attraction for Mencius, and are often referred to in his works. He was also fond of discussing the subject of human nature, holding the Confucian theory that it was naturally good. He held that man was born for uprightness, and he endeavoured to prove this from the fact that four moral qualities at least are found existing in all men: firstly, pity, which springs from its root in righteousness; secondly, benevolence, which has its root in righteousness; thirdly, a reverential spirit, which springs from an inherent sense of propriety ; and fourthly, a perception of right and wrong, which is the outgrowth of an inborn discernment that guides men into the knowledge of good and evil. Mencius held that if men would only allow these natural powers free play for their development, the result would be universal goodness. The ideal man, the Son of a king, as pictured by Confucius, had a charm for Mencius, who has had the honour of associating with him the "Five Eternal Virtues," viz., Love, Righteousness, Courtesy, Common Sense, and Sincerity. These have passed into a proverb which is being continually quoted by all classes of people, when any question of right or wrong is in dispute.

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[1] This famous philosopher was born B.C. 372 and died B.C. 289.

Of the five classics, the first in order is the *Yih King* or "Book of Changes." This is one of the most remarkable of the classics, due partly no doubt to its intensely abstruse character, for the mystic lines and combination of lines which form the basis and argument of the book are supposed to contain within them all the mysteries of cosmogony, philosophy, geomancy, and other occult arts that perplex the most profound thinkers and the most erudite scholars.

This work has served the Chinese, for at least three thousand years, as a foundation for the system of philosophical divination and geomancy which has such an overpowering attraction for the thinkers of the country. Its mysterious symbols and diagrams have, however, been used for meaner purposes than the above, for the fortune-tellers on the street, that tell men so glibly of the good or bad fortune awaiting them in the future, base their calculations very largely upon the combinations of lines that seem so utterly meaningless and absurd to the Western mind.

The second classic is called "The Book of History." The foundation of this book was ancient documents that told the history of China from the Great Yau down to the Chow dynasty, B.C. 2357-627. Many of these old manuscripts perished during the lapse of time, but those that survived were collected by Confucius and edited by him. Of the eighty-one documents that came into his possession, only forty-eight are extant at the present day. It may be remarked that they are the only existing sources of information that the historian can refer to when he wishes to describe the doings of those ancient times.

The third classic is named "The Book of Poetry." Its influence on the national mind has been very great. The songs or odes of which this work is composed were no doubt ancient ballads, that, Homeric-like, were handed down by tradition from one age to another. They seem to have been collected by Prince Wun at the beginning of the Chow dynasty, B.C. 1120, and to have been set to music. What we possess now is but a fragment of those that were originally in existence. These poetical relics are arranged under various heads, such as national odes, sacrificial odes, and greater and lesser eulogiums. They never rise to anything like sublimity. Some of them are quaint, others wanting in the true poetic ring, and all of them deficient in that force and passion that would stir men to heroic deeds or to noble lives.

The fourth classic is called "The Record of Rites," a book that is dear to the heart of a Chinese, for it fully accords with the bent and genius of his mind. It is supposed to have been written by Confucius. It contains minute rules of behaviour for every degree and every condition in society. How men should conduct themselves and what should be their deportment in critical cases so that they should not lose caste by any breach of the laws of etiquette are all stated with a minuteness that even the most obtuse could never misunderstand.

In this "Guide to Polite Society" the sage failed to include the fair sex. If he had lived in modern times he might have discovered that he had many things to learn that might have given him a broader outlook on everyday common life than his philosophy had ever taught him.

The fifth classic is called "The Spring and Autumn Annals," and has been accepted as the production of Confucius. His aim in this work was to continue the narrative contained in "The Record of History," for a further period of 242 years, viz., from B.C. 722 to B.C. 480. It is a most distressingly disappointing book, for it has not the least pretensions to literary ability. The story of the virtues and vices of certain kings is told without emotion and without passion of any kind. A railway porter's memoranda of the arrival and departure of certain trains have quite as much enthusiasm as these records of men that lived in the ancient past. The merest outline of events is given, and the author leaves the reader to fill up the details according to his own imagination. The fact that the book has survived at all is simply because of the great name of its author. Had any other less distinguished writer produced it, it would have been scornfully consigned to the butterman ages ago.

Besides these nine books that are universally received as the classics, there is still another one written by Confucius, called "Laws of Filial Piety," which is considered worthy of standing side by side with the above. It contains conversations carried on between Confucius and one of his disciples with regard to the nature and origin of filial piety, and the various ways in which this virtue can be carried out in ordinary life. Many famous commentators have discussed this book, and though the scholars of China have not looked upon it with the same favour that they have on their nine sacred books, yet because of its author and because of the strong instinct of the Chinese in favour of filial piety, they have been willing to accord it a place amongst the classics of the country.

The Western student is apt to be extremely disappointed when he first reads these books. His logical mind looks with a semi-contempt upon the unmethodical and scrappy way in which most of the subjects have been treated. The principles of political economy, for example, instead of being discussed in a profound and logical fashion, are thrown off in a free and easy style, during apparently casual and accidental conversations. The ancient history of this old-world empire is treated without the exercise of the critical faculty. Facts of the most vital importance are recorded without any attempt to verify them, very much in the spirit that a man would jot down statements in his note-book, with the intention of enlarging and polishing them up afterwards. Even when morality is being taught, there is an absolute want of system, and the finest thoughts are expressed in epigrammatic sentences and in loose, unconnected statements that lose a great deal of their force because of their want of logical sequence.

To the casual reader or thinker the above facts may seem alarming, and he will naturally come to the conclusion that the Chinese classics are not worthy of the high position that they have long held amongst the people of this empire. To do this would be a profound mistake.

The Oriental mind differs essentially from that of the West. The latter delights in logic, and syllogisms, and propositions carefully reasoned out, with every step linked together in such a way that the gradual evolution of the argument can be distinctly traced. The Eastern mind disdains any such method as too slow and inartistic. It revels in poetry, and in airy flights of imagination, and in delicate touches of thought that raise, as by an enchanter's wand, a vision of what no merely pure reasoning would ever suggest. The classics portray the mind of the East, and in the methods employed to convey the highest and the profoundest wisdom that their great sages had to teach, we realise that they went the only way in which the nation could be taught.

That the Chinese race has been marvellously touched and inspired by these famous books is certainly true, and it is all the more marvellous because the subjects discussed are not those that usually appeal to the passions and prejudices of a heathen people. The Homeric ballads, for example, roused the intensest enthusiasm amongst the people of Greece, because they told of feats of arms and deeds of daring done by famous warriors, that appealed to the fighting instincts of the nation, and kindled the war spirit and set the blood of the younger men on fire. Not one single element of this kind exists in the classics. Their ideals are righteousness, and loyalty, and love, and nobility of character. The Chinese never had a divine revelation to teach them how they were to live and die. The classics in a human, shadowy way, and without knowing it, are an attempt to supply the sad deficiency. The son of a king is a noble conception, caught in some supreme moment of inspiration. The nation, struck by the beauty of the picture, has accepted it as though it had been a divine vision, and in all the literature of the past ages no other writer has ever had the genius to devise a fairer one than this.

But these great classics that for many long centuries have moulded the character of the Chinese people are beginning to tremble on the throne on which they have sat so long. Their supremacy is being questioned by the new dream that has come into the brain of China. A new Power has appeared, and a Divine Teacher that will lead this mighty race into a nobler conception of even the very virtues that the sages but dimly grasped. The great books will slowly vanish, but the people will see a larger vision that will not isolate them from the vast world outside, but will bring them into a loving brotherhood with men of every clime.

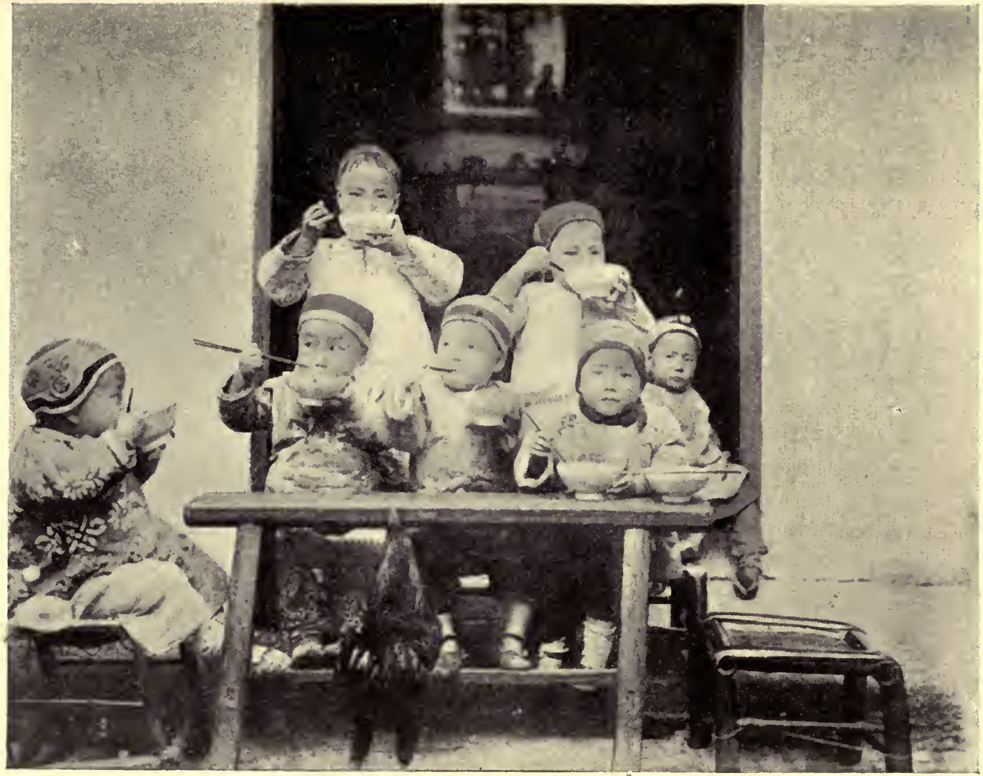
CHAPTER VI

SCHOOLS AND SCHOOLMASTERS

THE Chinese have a profound faith in education. High and low and rich and poor are absolutely of one mind on this point, and if a boy is not sent to school, it is either because the parents are too poor, or because they have not sufficient authority over him to compel him to study. One need not be surprised at this unanimity of opinion, for education is the royal road to the honours and emoluments that the State has to bestow, and it is by means of it that the wildest ambition that ever ran riot through a young man's brain can ultimately be satisfied. In the West there are many ways by which a man may rise to eminence, and finally occupy a prominent position as a Member of Parliament, or as holding some office under Government that will bring him before the notice of the public. In China they are all narrowed down to one, and it is the one that leads from the schoolhouse.

It is not to be inferred that because a person has never been to school therefore every chance in his favour of rising in life is placed beyond his reach. Every avenue is opened to him but one, and that one most coveted by every man in the empire. A man of no education, for example, may enter into business, and everything he touches may turn into gold. He may buy houses and lands and become famous for his wealth, and his reputation as a millionaire may extend beyond the limits of his own country ; but after all he continues to be only a tradesman, and he may never step within the charmed circle of the aristocracy, or be addressed by a title that is given to the poorest scholar in the land.

The graduate, on the other hand, though he may



SCHOOL CHILDREN AT DINNER.

To face p. 76.

be as poor as the proverbial church mouse, and though his father may be a labouring man, and he himself may be a person of such poor abilities that he can hardly earn enough to keep body and soul together, can hold his head higher in the estimation of the public than the merchant who is rolling in wealth. It may be confidently asserted that every schoolboy carries in his satchel a possible viceroyship when he will be the ruler of two provinces, perhaps, and where, untrammelled by parliaments, he may rule over twenty or thirty millions of people with a power that is not often questioned even by his sovereign.

Is it any wonder then that the land has been covered with schools, and that without any enactment of the Government, or any aid from the State, these have been found not only in the crowded cities where the population is dense, but also in every village that is not too poor to pay the salary of the teacher? The people have been so accustomed for ages to make their own educational arrangements that there is not the slightest danger of their falling through or being neglected. As there is no government education board to see that the education of the children of the country is provided for, the elders or leading men of a village or of a particular district in a city have met together, towards the close of the year, to discuss the question of next year's school. They have also to canvass the parents and find out how many boys are likely to attend it, and how much they will be able to pay during the year in order to secure a sufficient sum to induce a competent teacher to accept their invitation to take charge of it. These points having been ascertained, the next step was to look out for a schoolmaster. This was the most difficult part of the whole proceeding and one that was attended with the most serious consequences, both to the scholars and to the members of the community. It might happen that the village or the locality might be able to supply the man, and if his character had been sufficiently tested to permit of his being engaged, everything would run smoothly during his year of office. Should no such person be available, inquiries had to be made in other places, where teachers were known to exist, and after endless talk and recommendations and secret investigations into the moral and literary qualifications of a certain scholar, he was engaged for the vacant office. When once that had been done, the thing was settled for a year, beyond the power of any one, excepting the teacher himself, to break the engagement. The laws of the Medes and Persians were vacillating compared with laws in existence in China ; should any attempt be made to get rid of a teacher when once the agreement has been made, it would make the shade of Confucius shudder in dismay. And now we will suppose that the school year was just beginning. It was the seventeenth of the first moon, about the middle of our February. The winter holidays were just over. The festivities and gaieties that had ushered in the new year had ended and the nation was beginning to plan for the serious work of the coming year. The Feast of Lanterns, that only two days ago filled everybody with excitement, and illumined the homes and the streets with lanterns of every possible description and device, had become a thing of the past. Trade, commerce, and education that had been laid aside in honour of the new year had once more to be taken up by the people.

In anticipation of the opening of the scholastic year, the elders of the village had made all arrangements for the reception of the scholars. Let us enter and see what kind of a provision China has made for its future scholars, and high mandarins, and famous viceroys who are to be the rulers of the country in the coming years, for in this building we have a fair sample of every other schoolhouse in the empire. The Chinese do not believe in new-fangled notions, and to have anything but one style of schoolhouse would conflict with the national ideas of the fitness of things. It contains but one room and this is bare and unattractive in the extreme ; there is not one single element of comfort about it. The floor is an earthen one, unswept and untidy-looking, with miniature hills and valleys spread over its surface, made by the restless feet of the lads who studied here last year. The walls, instead of being adorned with maps and scrolls, are absolutely black with grime and dirt. The only pictures that can be seen upon them are the huge splashes of ink that have been flirted there by the incipient artists of the future. No attempt of any kind has been made to do away with the accumulated dust that lies thickly upon them, nor to disturb the spiders which complacently weave their webs in the corners, quite confident that they will never be disturbed any day during the year.

It had never entered into the thought of any one that the place would look more pleasant for a little whitewashing and that the boys would begin their studies with more hopeful hearts if the room could only be made to look a little more cheerful. The civilisation of China has never yet introduced such æsthetic thoughts into the school-life of its children, and the hand of woman with its gracious touch awaits a further development in national sentiment before it will be permitted to soften down the terribly Spartan look of the rooms where the youth of this land spend the early years of their young lives.

There are only two windows in the room, common, rough-looking ones, 2½ feet in height by 2 feet in breadth, with upright slender wooden bars in the centre to keep the thieves out and let the light in. Through these the summer breezes play, and the winter storms, in dull and mournful tones, speak of the passion that is rending their hearts. The one compensation for this miserable, forlorn-looking place is the view that one catches through the open door, and in a less degree through the narrow windows. A huge banyan-tree, with its magnificent boughs and countless branches, and its forest of unfading deep-green leaves, that stands a few score of yards away, is a vision that makes one forget the dingy room, with its blackened walls and uneven mud floors and its atmosphere of grime and dust. It ought to be a perpetual source of pleasure to the lads who have to spend the best of the year here, for it seems so very human in its varying moods and changes. At one time it seems cheery and lighthearted, as the great sun floods it with a blaze of sunlight. At another it is sombre and dispirited as the shadows flit over it and take the brightness out of its leaves and the merry twinkle out of its branches. Again, too, when the storm is raging it would seem as though the passion that lay slumbering in its heart had at last burst forth, and, reckless of consequences, would show the world what hidden power was stored up within it. Whatever dullness there may be in the school, the tree, at least, is determined that there shall be none in connection with it.

As the time draws near for the opening of the school, the scholars begin to assemble. They are of all sizes and ages, from seven or eight up to seventeen or eighteen. Some of them are little fellows who have a shy and frightened air about them, as though they were doubtful as to how they would get on in the school. Others, again, are full of life and spirit, and their black eyes flash with the fun that is racing through their hearts, and the jokes they make and the horseplay they indulge in are thoroughly typical of the schoolboy genus all over the world. In looks they do not compare favourably with a similar set of English lads. They are of a rougher and less refined type, and there is not a single gentlemanly-looking boy amongst them. They all have the appearance of belonging to the very lowest class. This is not really the case, however. That they look as if they belonged to the humbler classes is mainly due to the wretched, uninteresting clothes that the Chinese wear. In the case of these boys, these consist of loose trousers and just as loose and ill-fitting a coat, made of homespun dark blue cotton cloth, on many of them showing signs of wear. They are all made of one identical pattern, evidently by their mothers, and without any attempt to make them set off the person. They have been made on such a liberal pattern that boys of about the same size could easily exchange garments without their ever suspecting that they were not wearing their own clothes. Another reason, no doubt, for their anything but aristocratic appearance is due to the fact that the Chinese face has few elements of beauty in it. The high cheekbones, the large mouth, the almond-shaped slits out of which the small black eyes twinkle, and the yellow skin over which no ruddy colour ever passes, all tend to give a common, unæsthetic look to the great mass of people that one meets with in ordinary life.

Each boy has provided himself with a small oblong table, with two drawers in it for his books and papers, and a high wooden stool on which to sit. As they rush into the empty room each one selects the particular spot in it which catches his fancy, and so in the course of a few minutes the place is furnished and twenty boys are seated in the identical spots they are to occupy during the rest of the year. They seemed to us to be very much crowded, for, according to all Western sanitary ideas, the room was not large enough to accommodate one-half of their number if health was any consideration. This fact, however, gives the lads no concern. Discomfort seems the normal condition of the Chinese. Impure air, slovenly, filthy surroundings, horrible smells, hard benches and chairs that are a torture are all things that form part of the every-day life of the people of this vast empire. The boys, therefore, see nothing incongruous in having to study in a room that would soon place the same number of English boys in the hands of the doctor.

In the midst of the noise and babel of voices caused by the lads settling down into their places the teacher walks in from a room leading into the schoolroom, which is to be his home whilst the school is in session. There is an instant hush, and twenty pairs of eyes are fastened upon him with an intense and eager gaze. Every lad is trying to take his measure and see what sort of a man he has to deal with. Will he be severe or will he be kind? Will the hours pass by in torture whilst they are in his presence or will he be generous in his treatment of them, so that study shall be a real pleasure to them? These are the questions that flash through their young brains, and, though the man's face is sphinxlike, they have still penetrated enough to have caught a glimpse of what the possible answers may be.

The teacher takes his seat at a table that has been already placed for him by the elders of the village. On it are a large-sized inkstone, a diminutive earthen vase for the water with which to rub his ink on the stone, a very small brown teapot, and two or three Lilliputian teacups. Lying in a conspicuous place on it there is also a good stout, broad bamboo rod, which the scholars recognise as something specially belonging to them, and whose acquaintance they will not be long in making after the school has fairly got under weigh.

The man upon whom the eyes of the nervous, anxious lads are fastened does not utter a sound, neither does the ghost of a smile light up that impenetrable countenance of his. There are no cheery words for the boys, and no token that his heart has been moved by the sight of so many young faces before him. To show any sign of human interest in them, or to let them see that his heart has one grain of sympathy for them, would run right in the teeth of all the traditions of the past, and would be a mark of weakness that might endanger his authority over his pupils for the whole year.

His first duty is to classify the boys, see what books they have read, give them their lessons, and send them to their seats to learn them. All this is done with a severity fit to awe the hearts of the bravest. Let us for a moment glance over their shoulders at those strange, old-world-looking word pictures that have such a mysterious look about them and try and find out what they are studying. Chinese school-books are perhaps amongst the driest, mustiest, and crankiest that were ever put into the hands of schoolboys. The question whether they would ever interest or amuse them was never for one moment considered by their authors. There is no humour in them, nor a spark of wit. They are of the dullest and most dead-level description, and their great merit seems to consist in the fact that they will never by any chance bring up the ghost of a smile upon the face of the funniest or most laughter-loving lad who studies them. The Western method of beginning with such words as "cat" and "dog" is considered too puerile to be adopted in this land of great scholars and sages. Instead of that, the boy of eight or nine begins his literary career with a book that is concerned about a most profound and ethical question. It is called "The Three Character Classic," because it is composed of a series of sentences, each consisting of three words. Its first statement is a very dogmatic one, and that says "Man by nature is originally good." This has given rise to two schools of thinkers, one agreeing with it and the other dissenting from it. Just imagine an English boy of ten, instead of the breezy little stories and beautiful pictures to illustrate them with which he passes his day in the school, having to discuss some profound metaphysical question like the above, and it will be understood how dreary and monotonous are the early days of a Chinese schoolboy's life.

The ancient classics of China are next put into the hands of the pupils. These all deal with questions of how to govern a nation, with metaphysical subtleties, with profound ethical disputations, and with a host of other things that are more suitable for grown-up men to consider than schoolboys. That this is so is proved by the fact that the most advanced scholars of China spend all their lives in the exclusive study of these very books. The Chinese pupil, therefore, is much to be pitied. He has no joy in his books, but one eternal grind in his endeavour to imprint upon his memory the badly-printed words that seem to blot and smear the page. These never suggest anything that has to do with ordinary common life. They are always solemn and sedate, with square, shrivelled-up-looking little faces, as though laughter and fun and smiles were a crime against which they were bound to protest. No children's faces ever peer out of their pages, and no merry sounds ever echo from them. Such stories as "Jack and Jill, "Jack and the Beanstalk," or "The House that Jack built" never light up the black eyes of these laughter-loving lads with a sense of the ridiculous. The fact of the matter is, the Chinese have always legislated for grown-up people. No writer for two thousand years has ever written for the young. No artist of any standing has ever dreamed of painting pictures that would give them pleasure or that would depict child-life, and no scholar has ever thought of suggesting a series of school-books that might be easy and interesting. The consequence is that the same books have been used in every school throughout the empire, without pictures and without any illustrations whatsoever. They are usually printed on the flimsiest kind of paper in a type that is crowded and indistinct, and with paper covers that easily become dog-eared and disreputable-looking.

Let us come back to the boys who have taken their seats at their tables. The lessons have been assigned, each boy is in his place, and the master, with a cold and severe frown upon his face, is preparing copies for them to write by and by. We, of course, expect the most profound silence to reign in the room, but we soon get disabused of that idea. All at once, to our surprise, a thin, shrill voice is heard piping from one of the corners of the room, and almost at the same instant a deep bass sends forth its notes from an opposite direction. One by one others join in until there is not a single voice in the room silent, but every one, at the very highest pitch of voice that his throat can utter, is screaming out the words of his lesson. To us there is no harmony in the combined sound, for every lad acts quite independently of every other, and screams out at his own pitch the particular words he wishes to imprint on his memory. The Chinese, on the other hand, look upon these vocal calisthenics of the young pupils as one of the finest things connected with their school system, and people from the outside listen with the keenest delight to the confused and unmusical outburst of the lads, as without any harmony or rhythm they strive to perpetuate the sounds that started twenty centuries ago in the dawn of Chinese history.

It seems to me that the Chinese system of education is about as trying and as uninteresting as it is possible to make it. In the first place, the hours are too long. The little fellows may be seen about six in the morning wending their way with their books in their hands to the schoolhouse, where the master is already waiting for them with that severe look upon his face, as though he had never learned to smile. They continue to study till about eight, when they go home for breakfast. An hour hence they must be back again, and, seated on their high stools, they must be roaring out the antique sounds with a twang of past centuries in them till midday, when they are once more released for dinner. After duly shovelling down their throats the orthodox number of bowls of rice with their chopsticks, and swallowing diseased cabbage and disgusting-looking snails and slugs that have been browned in the frying-pan, they return once more to their stools, where they continue the roaring process of the morning until the evening shadows begin to creep under the high banyan-tree and into the schoolroom, where they put out the sunlight and play tricks with the little picture words, so that they cannot be distinguished in the deepening twilight. Then the school is dismissed, and by the time they have had their evening meal it is bedtime.

In the next place, the very nature of their early studies puts a difficulty in their way that absolutely prevents them from enjoying them. When the books are first put into the hands of the scholars they see before them a series of pictures made up of certain strokes of the pen, each one with its own distinctive marks that give it its individuality. Each picture stands absolutely alone. No connecting link binds any one to another or gives the least hint of what any one means. The cuneiform figures on an Assyrian inscription are transparently plain in comparison with these Chinese cryptic pictures that form their written language.

Now, the teacher never dreams of telling the lads the meaning of these little square-faced words. They simply tell the name by which each is called. It is supposed to be the precise one that was given to them by the great scholars and sages who invented them. This, of course, is entirely fanciful, for the original sound has been lost in the passage of the centuries, and in thousands of districts throughout the empire to-day the names that are given in each vary from those given by all the others. It will thus be seen that the names are entirely arbitrary, and give no indication whatever of the meaning of the words to which they are applied. This process of learning the sounds of the words only continues for four or five years, until all the recognised books taught in the schools have been read through. It may easily be imagined how dull and dreary the years must be in which only sounds are learned, and not a single fresh thought is being conveyed to the growing intelligence of the pupils. After the students have passed through this literary treadmill, the teacher begins to explain the meaning of all the pictures they have learned ; and now the books, instead of being filled with weird and mysterious symbols that suggest no thought, and give no suggestion to the mind, are replete with life. They speak in solemn tones, it is true, but it is the human voice that is now heard and that always has an attraction about it. The voices they hear are those of men that lived thousands of years ago, and as they try to catch their echoes it would seem as though some invisible link bound them to the past, so that in future their ideals are for ever inextricably bound up with the men whose thoughts mastered them when they were boys at school.

During the years that the lads spend their time amid the clash of sounds—each one brief but most inharmonious, and containing no germ thought that might appeal to their imagination, so as to lift them up now and again into the region of romance—the long hours must pass with leaden feet. There is no change of studies to lighten the monotony, and no recess when the whole school is let loose to shout and romp and for ten minutes to forget the drudgery and confinement of the hot, close room. The only possible relaxation is the permission for each boy to go outside for a minute or two, but only one at a time. On the master's desk lies a small bamboo token ; any boy is at liberty to go up and take it whenever he wishes to have a rest from the weariness of the schoolroom. He places it on his own table till he returns, when he restores it to its original place on the desk. The teacher can thus see at a glance who is out and how long he has been absent, and so there cannot be any undue skulking by any one. In the vast majority of the schools the teacher keeps a tight hand upon the boys and carries out a most stern and rigid discipline. The punishments are mainly for idleness and for not learning the lessons, for it is very rarely that discipline has to be exercised for disobedience or for refractory conduct during school hours. In chastising the most popular instrument is the bamboo rod that lies prominently on the teacher's desk. A lad who does not know his lesson is made to hold out his hand, when a number of strokes is given that usually makes him howl with pain. Another plan is to make him kneel on the ground until he has mastered his lesson ; or he is made to stand on a foot-square tile, with no liberty to move either of his feet, until walking up to the teacher and turning his back towards him he can recite his lesson without a mistake.

With regard to the teachers there is, as might have been expected, a great variety of characters. They constitute what are called the gentry of the country, and are most tenacious of their rights. They are proud and haughty, intensely conservative, and mortal foes to everything that is not Chinese. From an English standpoint, they are grossly and hopelessly ignorant ; for their education has never embraced any of the liberal arts, nor even such elementary subjects as arithmetic, geography, or general history. The only one branch in which they have been thoroughly trained are the standard classical books, that are the product of the sages who lived more than twenty centuries ago. These they can repeat word for word by heart, together with the recognised commentaries on them.

These works have developed certain lines of thought that have quickened the intellect of the learned, but their education has been so narrow that they know absolutely nothing of other studies that are familiar to our more advanced schoolboys in England. Every teacher is a king in his own school and will brook no interference or reproof from any one for his conduct of it. Should any person have the hardihood to express his displeasure at anything he has done, he has simply to complain of him to the nearest mandarin, who will squeeze him so unmercifully that he will be glad to humble himself in the dust and pay a good round sum with which to solace the teacher's wounded feelings. These remarks apply to the profession generally, even to those members of it who most disgracefully misbehave themselves and who utterly neglect their duties to their pupils. A man, for example, will teach a few days and then go on the spree. He will absolutely neglect his school and stay away for days and even weeks without once putting in an appearance. Most of the boys are, of course, delighted at this, but the parents are full of indignation, which they are careful, however, not to express so as to reach the teacher's ears. The man may continue this conduct the whole of the year, so that he may have taught only a few weeks during the course of it, and yet the full amount of salary must be paid him and the elders must part from him at the close of the year with profuse compliments, just as though he had fulfilled every duty and had been a model teacher. The only hold that people have on such scamps is the evil reputation these men get, which will deter people from employing them in the future.

There is one class of scholars in China that is peculiar to the country. The men belonging to it go by the name of the "Strolling scholars." They are all able, clever men, but they are absolutely without any moral character. They are the waifs and strays that float about society, and are a disgrace to the learned profession. They are very generally opium-smokers, a habit that disqualifies them for any steady work, whilst at the same time it demands a constant supply of money to ward off the pains and penalties that it makes its victims suffer when the craving is upon them. As they earn no regular salary, and are absolutely without private funds, they make it a practice to stroll round the country, and visit all the schools they come across. An unwritten law compels the teachers of these to invite them to take a meal with them, or, if it be late when they arrive, to spend the night with them, and when they leave to present them with a small sum to carry them on their way. The generality of teachers are in dread of these prodigals, as they are so unprincipled and without conscience that they never know what mischief they may be up to, or what nefarious schemes they may be planning to wring money out of them. If the schoolmaster be a strong man and a good scholar, he has nothing to fear. If, however, he be a man of only moderate abilities, and inferior scholarship, he is sure to be fleeced. For example, one of these strollers enters a schoolhouse during the time that lessons are going on. He sees at a glance that the teacher is a poor fellow, and no match for him. He at once assumes a stern and displeased air, and says: "You have no right to be the instructor of these boys, for you have not the learning that would qualify you to teach them. I propose to examine you to see if you are fit for your post, and if not you shall at once vacate it, and I shall take charge of the school. The better man ought to be here, and we shall at once decide whether he be you or I." It may be confidently affirmed that no such free-and-easy action could take place in any other country except China. The effect upon the poor teacher is most marked. He knows that he could not for a moment compete with this clever scamp, and so he hastens to come to terms with him, and buys him off with a good round sum. The stroller departs with a grim smile upon his leaden-hued visage, and chuckles in his heart whilst he makes straight for the first opium-den, where, amidst the reek and fumes of the drug, he gradually falls asleep thinking of the clever way in which he has been able to raise the wind for his present carouse.

The school system that I have been describing still exists, to a very large extent, in the villages throughout the land. The Government schools have, so far, been established mainly in the cities and prominent market towns. Lads ambitious of gaining their degrees and of thus being qualified to take official positions under the State, flock into them, as do also pupils for any other reason who can afford to pay the largely increased fees that are demanded from them.

Very many parents could not afford to send their sons to them, whilst others who desire only sufficient education to fit them to become business men, are quite content with the old system in which they themselves were trained.

There is no doubt but that in time the influence of the new learning will extend to all the common schools throughout the empire, but it will take a good many years to do that in such an extensive country as China. Under the new republic the State schools will no doubt develop more rapidly and on better lines than was possible under the old voluntary system, where the Government took no steps for the education of the children of the nation. It must be understood, however, that China, taken as a whole, is still carrying on the system of education that has been in existence during the past ages. How, indeed, could it be otherwise? It will take long before men trained to teach the new educational methods can be obtained for the countless schools throughout the empire. These must remain very much as they have always been until sufficient teachers are available.

CHAPTER VII

ANCESTOR WORSHIP

If we were to search through every class of society in China for the one spiritual force that influences and dominates them all, we should find it to be ancestor worship. There is no other in the region of belief that would take its place for a moment. A man, for example, may worship the idols or not; he may profess a belief in them or he may express his utter scepticism about them, and no one cares a button what he thinks. Let a man, however, neglect the worship of the dead, and he is looked upon with the utmost scorn, both by his own kindred and also by his neighbours. The bitterest taunt that the Chinese can hurl against the convert to Christianity, and the one that stings him most, is the sneering statement that he has no ancestors.

This worship dates back to the very earliest times of Chinese history. Confucius, in his "Record of Rites," lays down minute rules as to the etiquette that should be observed in its performance. It would seem, however, as though its character has materially changed since his time. Then, the services in the ancestral temples were simply memorial ones, in order to keep alive the recollection of the loved ones who had passed away and to prevent their memory from fading out of the minds of the living.

During the centuries that have elapsed since then, a great many accretions have been added to the original idea. Men after a time began to believe that the founders of their clans, though dead, possessed great power in the land of spirits, and that they could control the lives and fortunes of their kindred on earth. With the gradual growth of this belief, faith in ancestor worship struck its roots deeper and deeper into the hearts of the nation. Since the prosperity or adversity of the clan depended upon the dead father of the race, it became an article of prime importance that regular worship should be paid to them, and that the bond that bound the living and the dead should never be snapped even for a moment. The idea of kindly recollection of the dead has vanished, and men keep up the worship of them now simply because they fear that if they neglect them, decay of fortunes and sorrows innumerable will fall upon the homes of their posterity.

The Chinese theory is that a man has three souls. When he dies one of these goes into the "Dark World," where, it is believed, it finds a state of things very similar to that which it left in this life. The popular ideas, however, on this subject are very vague, and will not bear pressing too closely, but there is a general conception that the other world is a counterpart of this, only its conditions are of a decidedly inferior, and less cheerful, character. A second soul remains in the tomb, whilst the third enters the ancestral tablet, and it is with these two last that ancestor worship is entirely concerned.

If the man be a chief of his clan, his tablet is placed in the ancestral temple amongst those of the distinguished men of his kindred, but if he be an ordinary individual, it is put in some convenient place in his old home, where it is cared for by the friends who mourn his loss. The spirit in the grave is worshipped once a year in the spring, at the festival called the Feast of Tombs. In some respects this ceremony is one of the most interesting sights that one meets with in China. The hills and mountains that abound in the southern part of the empire are the favourite places where the people like to bury their dead. This is not entirely from an æsthetic point of view, but simply because the *fêngshui* there is believed to be so powerful that it will combine with the efforts of the dead ancestors in sending down blessings upon the living descendants.

It is the custom at the Feast of Tombs for nearly the whole population to turn out and visit their family graves on the hillsides. The husband and the wife and the little ones troop out with happy faces for their joyous expedition to the hills. It is an annual picnic that, for the youngsters at least, has a fascination and a charm that have put sunshine into their lives for weeks before. The man carries a hoe and his wife sundry good things in a basket that are to serve both as offerings to the dead and as the feast that they will all, by and by, partake of when the service is over.

The appearance of the mountains at this time is a highly picturesque one. They are bathed in floods of sunshine that steep them with a glory that dazzles one to look upon. And see how beautifully they are fretted and veined with shadows. Here a monster cliff, projecting from the face of the mountain, paints a dark picture of itself on the glowing canvas ; whilst there light and transparent shadows of the passing clouds travel over the sunlit face of the hill and add the grace and charm of variety to it. The grass, amber-hued, dyed by the winds that sung and sighed amongst it during the winter months, seems to be looking piteously for the spring rains to flash the green back again into it ; whilst the hills, that one can see in the distance, appear dusky red when viewed through the hazy glory of the fiery rays of the sun.

The figures that move in and out the thousands of graves that dot the face of the hills give them a warm and living look. The men and women in their dull blue cotton clothes seem like delicate shading in the fierce light by which they are enveloped ; whilst the girls in their white cotton dresses, trimmed with shades of pink and crimson, act as a silver lining to the shadows that now and again mingle with the sunlight. The picture produced by fiery sun, and fleecy clouds, and figures moving amongst the lights and shadows on the hillsides is one full of poetry, and suggestive of thoughts that carry one away from dull earth to a land of romance.

When the family arrives at the grave, the father uses the hoe he has brought with him to repair the damage that the rains and storms of the past year have done to it. Whilst he is trimming it and returfing the mound that has lost its shapely roundness, the wife and girls are placing the offerings of food on the stone slab in front of it, ready for the hungry spirit within to satisfy the long fast of the year. When all these preliminaries have been gone through, the father, as the high priest of the family, stands erect in front of the grave, and with hands uplifted and pressed together he addresses the spirit: "Your children have come to-day with offerings of food. We are poor, or we would have brought you a richer repast than what we have spread before you. Come, we pray you, and disdain not the simple food, but partake of it, and so show that you love us as you did before you left us for the dark world."

He then goes on to tell the dead how the family is: "We have not prospered during the past year. We have had losses in the business. Sickness has visited our family, and we can only just manage to drag through life, though we all work hard and use the utmost economy in the home. We look to you to save us in the future. Remember our kinship, and use your power to bless us with prosperity. Listen to us, our father, and cheer the hearts you still love by rescuing them from poverty and disgrace."

After this formal worship of the dead, the good things that have been left over by the now satisfied spirit are eaten by the hungry family. The eyes of the girls glisten as they look at the cakes and the cold fowl and the luscious fruits that hunger, stimulated by the mountain air, invests with a charm they could not have had in the frowsy old town from which they have just ascended, at the foot of the hills. What a splendid day they are having! There is not a cloud upon the face of any one of them, but the dainties disappear amid laughter and jokes and pleasant conversation that make the time fly.

At length the afternoon begins to wane. The sun has gone down behind a distant mountain, and a twilight has crept into the air and dimmed its richness. The shadows, too, lengthen, marching as it were out of the night, and quenching the golden hues that have touched the landscape with their glory. The crowds upon the mountain-side now begin to dissolve. The varied stories of the past year, with their tragedies and comedies, have been rehearsed in the hearing of the dead, and with last lingering looks at the mounds that contain the ashes of those they love, they wend their way to the plain beneath. For another year the solitude will be unbroken, excepting by the foot of the passer-by, and all that will be left to care for them will be Nature's kindly hand, which will strive to repair the damage done by storms and rain and sunshine by covering them with grasses and wild flowers.

The spirit in the tablet[1] in the home is worshipped twice a year, with very much the same ceremonies as that in the grave. The greatest honours are reserved for the spirits of the founders and chiefs of the clan, whose tablets are placed in a large building called the Hall of Ancestors. These are worshipped in the spring and autumn by all the members of the clan that can possibly attend. A description of an actual service will give the reader some idea of the important place it occupies in the estimation of the Chinese, and the hold it has upon the imagination and faith of the worshippers.

The hall where the ceremonies are performed is a large, substantial building, capable of holding six or seven hundred people. It is massively built, and is in excellent repair, thus contrasting favourably with the idol temple near by, that is in a forlorn and somewhat dilapidated condition, well in keeping with the generality of such buildings.

It is a notable day this, for it is the autumn festival, and the clan will assemble to worship the spirits that are supposed to hold the honour and prosperity of every member in their keeping. Crowds of men, with newly-shaven heads and queues beautifully plaited, are buzzing about like bees. It is evidently a gala day with them, and a feast must be in store to give them such a happy, joyous appearance. Their faces are suffused with smiles, their black eyes sparkle, and laughter is heard from groups here and there where some amusing subject is being discussed.

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[1] The ancestral tablets are oblong pieces of wood about six inches in length and two and a half in width. The names of the deceased are inscribed upon them and their spirits are supposed to reside in them. Foods of various kinds are offered to them, but the real eaters are the men who make the offerings.

It is a most respectable-looking gathering, for the shabby every-day working clothes have been discarded and they have put on their best. A few, in honour of the occasion, are dressed in semi-official garments, and the change in them is amazing. Here is one man so transformed that we cannot recognise him. He is a farmer, and to see him in his fields one would consider that he was a superior kind of beggar, who by mistake had wandered from his calling and had turned a worker. To-day in his handsome dress, his mandarin-looking hat, and his upright and dignified carriage, one would easily mistake him for a petty official. Another man looks like a prince, so gorgeously is he robed, and yet on other days, when you meet him in his own house, he wears the shabbiest clothes, and will show you with a look of pride in his eyes a worn-out-looking coat that he has had in use for more than thirty years.

Suddenly at a given signal the hum of conversation dies away, and the broad, good-humoured faces become sober, whilst ten venerable-looking men, wearing official hats and with long white robes that hide a multitude of sins beneath, gather in front of the long table on which the tablets are placed. These are the chiefs of the various branches into which the clan has divided since the founder, centuries ago, gave it birth, and to-day they stand here to represent the whole. Two of these take their places at the ends of the table, whilst the rest remain standing in front. One of them is about thirty years of age. His face is a highly intellectual one, and shows signs of severe study. He is pale and emaciated, but there is a fire in his eye and a look of power on his face. He is a scholar and has won his first degree. His elegant B.A. dress, with the handsome hat and button, makes him a conspicuous figure in this great gathering.

The man opposite to him is also a degree man. He has the typical air and bearing of the man of his class. He has a proud and insolent look, and though he has to endeavour to put on an air of modesty as he stands in the presence of the great men of his clan, whose spirits are believed to be in the tablets before him, one can see from the haughty tilt of his head and the occasional flash of his coal-black eyes, that beneath that assumed look of humility there is a soul full of the deepest pride.

He is a beau-ideal Chinese of the educated type. His cheek-bones are high and staring, and his eyes glisten from behind the almond-shaped slits where the black orbs seem to be hiding themselves. His mouth is large and sensuous-looking, whilst his nose is as flat as though he had fallen on a fender when he was young and it had never recovered its Grecian shape. He is far from being a beauty, for his skin is yellow, tanned by this great Eastern sun, so that every rosy tint has been banished from it. No wonder that he is sallow and wanting in that fresh look that brightens the faces of our young men, for he has never seen a hay-field, and he has never caught a breath of the breeze that has come over hawthorn hedges, nor wandered through orchards laden with cherry and apple blossoms. And yet there is a sign of power about him that marks him as belonging to an imperial race, that has survived all the degenerating effects of a weedy, crazy kind of civilisation that has stifled the energies of the people of this great country. These two men are the masters of ceremony for the day.

There must be at least five hundred men in the building, but not a single woman. In the sacrificial duties of the day no woman may take a part. By and by a large, coarse-featured man steps forward from the group standing in front of the tablets, and, in obedience to the command of one of the masters of the ceremony, pours some samshu [1] into three diminutive cups. Kneeling down and waving one of these between his uplifted hands, he says, in a loud voice, "Your son of the tenth generation kneels before you with an offering of spirits. Come and drink." Every dish on the tables, that have been spread with a number of delicacies, is successively offered until the spirits are supposed to be satiated with the good things that have been prepared for them.

After this, one of the scholars takes a long scroll that contains the names of all the families of the clan, with the numbers of sons in each, and reads it for the benefit of the dead fathers. Not a woman's name is mentioned throughout it. She has no official status in the clan, for every girl that is born into it is considered as so much lost to it, for in the course of time she will have to be married into some other clan, and so can never be considered as adding to the strength of her own. At the conclusion of this dry, statistical process the document is committed to the flames, and it is thus supposed to go straight to the "Land of Shadows," where the fathers live, for them to study it at their leisure during the next six months.

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[1] Samshu is a kind of whisky distilled from rice or sweet potatoes; it is fiery and intoxicating, and quickly flashes fire into the face of the drinker.

The last and concluding act of this weird ceremony was a very striking one. At the call of one of the masters of ceremony every man in the building knelt down and knocked his head on the ground in the direction of the tablets. There was no attempt to minimise this part of the service, for the sound of five hundred heads bumping against the earthen floor was distinct and emphatic. Even the little fellows who accompanied their fathers took a share in this, and thus, in the midst of the men of their clan, they were initiated into a service that would leave an indelible impression on their hearts and make them consider ancestor worship as the supreme one in which they were to believe.

With the five distinct bumps upon the ground that would have made the heads of any other people but the Chinese sore and groggy, the worship ended, and an immediate move was made towards the tables that groaned with all the good things that the ingenuity of the best cooks could provide. And here the company was seen at its best. If there is anything a Chinese puts his soul into it is a feast. It is looked forward to as Christmas is with us. Visions of succulent pork and snow-white rice, and pickled cucumber, sharp and crisp, that will succumb beneath the teeth with a sound that is enough in itself to give an appetite, besides a host of other delicacies, such as chickens, ducks, bird's-nest soup and such like, all float before his delighted imagination up to the very moment that he sits down to the feast. And when the actual moment of bliss arrives with what gusto does he not enter into the spirit of the occasion! There is no toying and dallying with the dishes. Every one has to be tasted, for his capacity seems to grow with the demand made upon him. The memory of this feast will last him until it has been effaced by another, and one of the pleasantest thoughts about it will be the feeling that it was all got at another's expense. It is said that the Spartans held that hunger was the best sauce, but they were fools to the Chinese, who consider that to partake of a feast that they have not had to pay for is one of the greatest stimulants to a good appetite that they could possibly desire. For some minutes the great assemblage was silent. The only sounds were the clicking of chopsticks and the peculiar sighing of the indrawn breaths by which the Chinese cool the hot mouthfuls of rice which they shovel reeking down their throats. We should consider this last very vulgar, but the Chinese look upon it as sweet music to hasten on the march of the disappearing rice.

After a time, when the first keen pangs of hunger had been assuaged and the edge of the appetite had been taken off, low and gentle murmurs of conversation began to be heard. By and by as the hot samshu began to work, and the faces became flushed, a babel of voices filled the temple, for every tongue had become loosened, and the imagination was beginning to run riot under the influence of the good things on which they were feasting. Hours went by without any signs of weariness. The thought of this great feast was to last them for six months, and so they clung to the tables and quaffed the hot, fragrant spirit from the dainty little cups, and dallied with the various dishes, till at last, worn out, they laid their chopsticks on the table and confessed their inability to eat any more.

Some few with stronger appetites lingered with the chopsticks held with deft and knowing hands and appealed to others who had been beaten in the contest to come and join them, but these piteously shook their heads, and with a significant motion up and down their stomachs with their open hand, declared that they were "full." This word with us is vulgar and never used in polite society. Not so in China, where it is a highly popular and refined expression and indicates a happy condition where the highest material happiness has been attained. When the Chinese wishes to say "How do you do?" he does not use the vague expressions we are content with. He comes to the point and says "Have you eaten?" You say, "Yes, have you?" He nods a "Yes." Then mutual smiles light up the faces of both parties, for they know that the *summum bonum* has for the time being been attained and Fate has little power to harm them.

It seems to me that the whole system of ancestor worship owes its present existence in a very large measure to these feasts, and that if they were abolished it would be very much shorn of its significance.

The cult has been perpetuated and intensified by these feasts. The founders and chiefs of the clan were evidently conscious that it would require something more than mere sentiment to make their descendants remember them after they were dead. They consequently left endowments, in the shape of public lands, that were to be used for paying all expenses connected with the worship of them. In order to prevent the absorption of these properties by future powerful members of the clan, it was decreed that they should be held in rotation by the different branches, who were allowed to appropriate to their own private use whatever sums remained after all the expenses connected with this worship had been met. The founders thus appealed not only to the religious instincts of the tribe, but also to their passions.

Every member of the clan has a personal interest in the matter. The feasts come to him free, and when his turn comes round, he has the handling of the proceeds of this ecclesiastical endowment. The system has thus become rooted in the hearts of the Chinese through the selfish interest they have had in it. Take away the lands and abolish the feasts, and in time belief in the dead would be greatly modified and the regular worship of the clan, at least, would gradually die out. China is not the only country in the world where endowments have been the means of perpetuating systems and of fostering customs that have not always been for the highest good of the nation.

With the ending of the feast the great assembly begins gradually to melt away. Singly and in groups the men that sat round the festal board and filled the great hall with the sound of their happy voices wind their way along the narrow pathways through the fields to their various homes. The official-looking hats that gave them such a dignified air, and the clothes that took away the mean and shabby look of their every-day appearance are taken off and carefully laid away in some box where the dust cannot reach them, until they may be required for some other festive occasion. In the meanwhile the great hall has been closed, the remains of the feast have been removed by that branch of the clan whose business it is this year to arrange for the offerings to the spirits of the dead, and the few dozen tablets that have the honour of being worshipped by the clan are left in solitude for six months more.

In this semi-annual service there are no elements of poetry nor romance. It is entirely a mere matter of business. No spirit of love or of affection has caused the gathering that has met here to-day to perform the ceremony just described. Most of the spirits left the earth at least a hundred years ago or so. The men of to-day have lost touch with them. What kind of men they were no one knows nor, for that matter, cares. There is one profound impression, however, that binds the living to them, and that is that in that unseen world those shadowy, misty forms, that once lived here and tilled the fields and lived the common life of to-day, have in some mysterious way been transformed so that they hold the fate of their descendants in their hands. Whatever tenderness they may have had in actual life has evidently been crushed out of them by their sad and bitter experiences in the dark world in which they now live. This latter is supposed to be a facsimile of the present, only with all the joyous elements eliminated, and with the main features of this following them like a Nemesis into that. The poor spirit never finds itself suddenly transformed into a wealthy one, but the same struggle that it had here goes on, though more intensely, in the new life, where no sun ever shines, and a perpetual gloom crushes all joy out of the heart. The man who has been beheaded walks about for ever a headless ghost. His lot is one of the most pitiable of all, for he can have no human companionship, and he can never express the thoughts that wander through his heart, whilst the voice of sympathy can never ease the unending pain of his existence.

Now it is a remarkable fact that the Chinese believe that the innumerable hosts that dwell in that clouded land are absolutely dependent upon their friends in this for any comforts they possess there. The food they eat and the money they have to spend all come from earth, and are transmitted through the annual offerings that are made to them. Any cessation means suffering to the spirits, and, sullen and enraged at the neglect, they send misery and calamity upon the home of their friends.

This thought is so deeply ingrained in the nation that the Chinese have actually arranged a separate festival for the spirits in Hades that have no living friends on earth, and who, therefore, are left hungry and uncared for in that dark land. During the month of August, the whole empire, by an almost unanimous consent, lays out tables in the open air with all the various kinds of food that the Chinese delight in for the special benefit of the hungry spirits that the presiding god of Hades lets out for this month. They are thus supposed to be propitiated by the kindness of mortals and to be induced to refrain from using their supernatural powers to distress mankind.

The worship of the dead at the grave, whilst it still has the commercial character in it, is of a much more kindly nature than that performed in the great ancestral hall. The reason for this is obvious. The friends that lie buried there are of a nearer kinship, and the loss of them is generally more recent. Some loved one has been taken from the home, and the sorrowing hearts, full of agony at their loss, come with tears that flow naturally and with loud and passionate outcries to bewail their loss. And it is not simply at stated times that the mourners come to these graves to unburden their hearts of the sorrows that fill them. A husband, for example, has died. He was only just in the prime of life. He and his wife were devotedly attached to each other, though none would have dreamt of it had they simply seen them in every-day life. Etiquette in China demands that neither husband nor wife shall show before others any sign whatever that they love one another. Well, the husband one day is attacked by one of those maladies that in these Eastern lands run their course so rapidly, and, before the wife has time to realise that danger threatens, her husband is dead.

And now what a change takes place ! It would seem as though the great fountains of the woman's heart had burst all bounds and were pouring forth treasures that it had been hiding for years. The restraints that society had put upon her when her husband was alive have now vanished with his death, and she indulges in the most passionate expressions of devotion that any woman East or West, with the wildest or the deepest love, could ever imagine. Her cries are uttered in the presence of her neighbours—who, Oriental-like, gather round to witness what is going on—and are full of the fondest terms of endearment, yet no one dreams of suggesting that they are unwomanly. The human heart beats with the same musical rhythm throughout the world, and, though custom may crush and stifle the tones that God has given it, there must inevitably come a time when Nature shall assert herself and the cry of the soul shall be heard.

It is most pathetic to stand by the grave and listen to what might be called the love song of the widow to her dead husband. One day I was walking by a hillside that was literally packed with graves. The solemn-looking little mounds were drawn so closely together that there was hardly standing room between them. Some were newly-made, as could be seen by the fresh mould and the newly-cut sod with which they were covered. Others again showed signs of age, for the rains and winds had beaten them down till they were almost flat, whilst tall, sedgy grasses grew rankly out of their very centre. It was a venerable cemetery, for I could see from one or two slight projections that were quite marked that one or two tiers of dead lay buried beneath those that occupied the graves that lay open to our sight. There must have been thousands lying asleep on that hillside.

Whilst I was revolving in my mind the thoughts suggested by the scene before me, a woman suddenly appeared winding her way in and out amongst the graves, until she stopped and knelt down before one that had been but recently made. She was tall and graceful, with a face that, if it had been lighted up with a smile, would have been a most pleasant one. Just now, however, it was inexpressibly sad, and sorrow had laid its heavy hand upon it. I knew at once that she was a widow, for she was in deep mourning. I saw, too, that she had come to weep out her heartache at the tomb of her husband. She began by moaning in a low monotone, as though her sorrow was too great to allow of articulate utterance. By and by her voice rose, with passionate exclamations of "My misery, oh! how great! how miserable my fate! my life, I cannot bear it. Oh! I must die, I must die, I cannot endure my misery." Still her voice continued to rise as her grief seemed to get control of her, and then she began to pour out the tragedy of her life, and to weave in fitful agonising words the story of her loss. "My love, my life! why, why have you left me? My heart is desolate, and I wander about bereft of comfort with none that can speak to me and with none whose words can touch me as yours ever did. Why did you leave, ah! why did you leave me with a broken heart?" As the full force of her sorrow seemed to come with an overmastering power as she recited her woes, her voice took a note higher, till it sounded wild and weird. Tears are now rolling down her cheeks and her eyes are red and swollen; she seems the very image of despair and sorrow. Again she calls upon her husband to witness her grief, and every endearing word that a woman's heart knows how to conjure up is poured forth upon the man that lies silent in the grave before her. Ah! she appears to me no longer to be the Chinese woman whose heart seems so difficult to touch by the power of love, the fire of which has never inflamed it into a burning passion. She must be some sorrowful woman who has wandered hither from another land where natures are more fiery; where the human soul is filled with poetry and romance ; and where love is the one divine force that with its mystic touch can set the soul ablaze. But no, there is no mistaking that she is a true daughter of this ancient land, where custom and etiquette have striven for ages to teach the souls of men and women to conceal their deepest and divinest emotions.

In this most pathetic but most dramatic scene there was one thing that was most noticeable. In all the passionate appeals to her dead husband as to why he had left her to sorrow and despair, she never once suggests the idea that she hopes one day to meet him in the future. Such a thought does not occur to the Chinese mind. The husband has left her, and never more will she behold him again ; thus the bitterness of the separation that fills her heart with anguish. He has gone for ever out of her life, and wherever she may wander when she has done with the things of this world she will never by any chance meet him again.

And now occurred a pleasing break in this most sad and touching scene. Two young English girls, who were skipping and racing about after each other amongst the graves, caught sight of the weeping woman, and, drawn by sympathy, approached with wondering faces and stood listening to her sorrowful story. By and by, touched beyond control by the sight of her tears and by the agonised look upon her face, they started impulsively forward and stood on either side of her. " You must stop crying now," they said, " you have wept enough for to-day. You will make yourself ill if you go on in this way," and gently taking her by the arms they helped her to rise. The woman looked amazed, but seeing the frank young faces and the look of genuine sympathy upon them, she accepted their interference in a kindly spirit and after a few pleasant words she slowly left the grave and returned to her home.

The dead and the living are bound together by the mysterious worship of ancestors ; but the living have only a memory, for there is no future for them in their thoughts of the loved ones that have perished. No sage has ever been able to suggest a thought on this dark subject, and no independent genius in all the ages of the past has ever in a moment of inspiration thrown a gleam of light upon it. The nation has been waiting for the revelation that will come when Christianity has opened up to them the wonders and mysteries of the future.

CHAPTER VIII

FÊNGSHUI

THE physical world to the Chinese is not the dead, inanimate thing that it is to us. We look upon a landscape, and we see mountains and streams and fertile plains, dotted with villages and yellow with the ripening crops, and when we have mastered the scene in all its details we have exhausted all that in a general way it is possible for us to know about it. It is not so with the student of Nature in this land. To him the mountains are not the solitary places we imagine them to be, where the footfall of the stray traveller, the whirr of the wings of the flying birds, or the musical hum of the falling streams are the only sounds that break the monotonous silence of the hills. To his imagination they are peopled with fairies, not indeed of the light-hearted kind that our forefathers pictured as dancing in the moonlight in forest glades, or by the wooded streams that send their music far over the hills, but venerable and sedate, with long, grey beards and wrinkled faces and thoughtful looks.

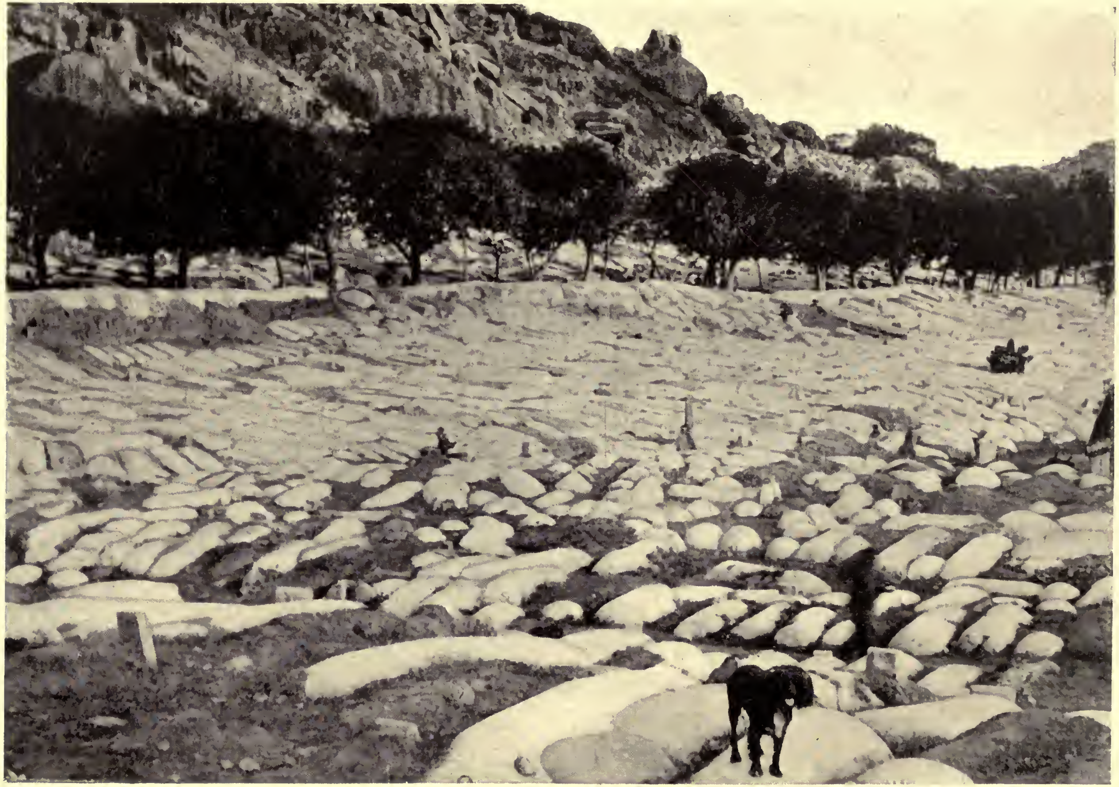
The great valleys again, where the gloomy pines grow amidst the shadows that are rarely lighted by a passing sunbeam, are said to be peopled by forms that sometimes may be seen as the twilight creeps into the departing day, or when the silver moonlight illuminates the forest. All these mix themselves in human affairs, and many a romance in life that has changed the fortunes of men and brought sunshine into their homes might be traced to these kindly beings that shrink from the sight of man.

Besides these benevolent spirits that plan for human happiness, there are demons and spirits that wander about in search of opportunities to deceive and injure mankind. They will turn themselves into all kinds of shapes in order the more easily to carry out their fell purpose. Sometimes, as in the case of St. Dunstan, they will appear in the form of a most beautiful woman, and at another as an aged man with kindly face and words full of tenderness. Many a life has been wrecked by them and many a fortune has vanished through their cunning wiles.

The imagination of the Chinese does not stop with the creation of these hosts of spirits, both good and bad. It has also conceived the idea that beyond all these things there are certain invisible forces that exercise a most potent influence over the fortunes of men. They can bring wealth, or sorrow. They can afflict a district with disaster, or they can bless it with prosperity. They can send floods that shall drown the crops and leave men to starve, or they can send the gentle showers that will cause the fields to smile with harvests and fill the homes with plenty.

These forces are a profound mystery. No one can describe what they are like, nor precisely where they reside. They move about by laws of their own. Sometimes they wind along a valley, and then they rush madly over a plain. They creep up the sides of a mountain and take possession of the very summit. They rush round the headlands by the seashore with a noise that is like the roaring of the storm, and they claim to control, in some mysterious way, the fortunes of both the living and the dead. There is no question but that fêngshui is one of the most potent supernatural forces in China, and has done more to prevent its growth and development than any other. The Chinese have reduced fêngshui to a science, and there is a class of men who get a very comfortable living by professing to know its principles and to be able to apply these to the practical questions of every-day life.

From a long experience of this mysterious subject, it would seem that the primary object of fêngshui is not to bless but to injure. It is a malignant, haughty, bad-tempered force that will work havoc in human life, unless diverted by some other that proves superior to it, and then its cursing power seems to vanish and it stays to bless. Every city, therefore, in the empire,



A CHINESE GRAVEYARD ON THE HILLSIDE.

There is no ~~doubt~~ question but that feng-shui is ne of the most potent supernatural orces in China...

len + Manners of Modern China. MacGowan

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and every great plain has selected in self-defence some natural object that is to act as its guardian against their invisible enemy, and which for the sake of brevity they call their fêngshui. When this object has a resemblance to any living form, it is considered to be very powerful.

The fêngshui, for example, of a certain county city is a large piece of ground that gradually slopes from the suburbs in the direction of the centre of the town, and has the shape of a snail. This strange conformation is looked upon as the source of all the prosperity and happiness that have come to the city. It has the power, it is affirmed, of gathering all the baleful influences that the fêngshui would scatter broadcast over the town within itself, and of transforming them into blessings. When a new mandarin arrives in the city to take office, his first public duty is to go in state to this venerable snail and give directions about its preservation, for he believes that not only the welfare of the town and district, but also his own honour and reputation are bound up in it. No spade may ever cut into it and woe be to the man who would have the temerity to build on it! He would be ruthlessly murdered by an affrighted and indignant population. The city has a high reputation amongst mandarins, and officials come here with light hearts to enter upon their duties. It is said that for many generations no magistrate has ever got into any trouble here. No one has ever been accused by the people to his superior, nor deprived of his office ; neither has any disaster happened to him in his government of the people. When his term of office has expired he has returned to his far-off home in another province with health and honour. All this has been put down to the silent influences of the humble mound that watches so vigilantly over the interests of the city. In very many cases Nature has been kind enough to supply some conformation of land, or some notable rock that the professors of geomancy, after long consideration and an infinite amount of twaddle, have pronounced capable of defending a place from the fiercest assaults of the invisible foe. It does happen, sometimes, that a town has no natural fêngshui of its own. This difficulty must be at once met by the creation of an artificial one. The idea of a city without any would be as intolerable as it would be to allow it to be without walls, whilst hosts of bloodthirsty marauders were known to exist in every direction around it.

A city in the South of China was at one time in its history the subject of a succession of disasters that were bringing it to the verge of ruin. Pestilence carried off its people, and floods and droughts brought sorrows that were reducing its inhabitants to despair. Men began to look around to discover the cause of these calamities, and it was found that the town had no fêngshui. Of course, it now became quite easy to explain how it was that plague made such ravages in its narrow streets and filthy alleyways. It was not caused by bad sanitation, nor by the absence of drainage. It was the work of malign forces that were quite free to work their evil purpose on the city.

The most celebrated professors of the art of geomancy were invited to devise plans for meeting this difficulty, and they suggested that two immense pagodas should be built within the walls of the city, one on the east and the other on the west. This was accordingly done, all classes contributing liberally towards the expense. The pagodas towered above the streets and lands that lay within sight of them, and the people, dwelling beneath their shadow, felt themselves safe against the attack of demons and spirits that fled dismayed as they caught a glimpse of these mighty forms. To-day the city is a flourishing one. Its streets are crowded with traders from all parts of the province, and the fame of its scholars has travelled far and wide throughout the empire, all due, it is believed, to the mighty power exercised by these two stately pagodas.

Thus far we have been dealing with fêngshui as a power that has to do with living forces. It has a function, however, more dread and far-reaching in connection with the dead. The Chinese believe that these latter have the power of blessing or cursing the friends they have left behind them on earth, but that they can do either only through the agency of the unseen forces that cluster around the places where they lie buried. It is believed that these forces are materially assisted in their action by the conformation of the ground in which the dead have been buried. If it has the shape of some well-known powerful animal, then the fêngshui of the place is considered to be especially strong, and the family of the dead who are buried near it will have great prosperity. Sons will be born and wealth will flow in upon it. A crouching tiger, for example, of which there are numerous instances in any hilly country, is eagerly seized upon as a burying-place. The tiger, to the Chinese mind, is the king of beasts, and holds its own supreme amongst any others that are known. Such figures as this are supposed to be impregnated in a very powerful way with the fêngshui elements that render its influence in human life irresistible. A grave near its head, or close by one of its paws, is considered to be a place where unusual power is exerted, and, consequently, the family of the deceased may expect in a very short time to have its fortunes changed and a tide of prosperity to flow in upon it. As might have been expected, those who have the means to afford it spare no expense in the selection and purchase of spots where the fêngshui is the most powerful. The cleverest geomancers are engaged to find out the particular localities that are most likely to bring fortunes to the family. With compass in hand, they note the lie of the hills and running streams, and the trend of the land ; they then mark with a measuring-line the exact place, to within an inch, where the dead man is to be laid. Fearful lest their instructions should in the least degree be departed from, they stand by whilst the grave is being dug and see that there is no departure from the geomantic line that has been drawn.

Very often a rich man will lie in his coffin for months, waiting for the discovery of some place where the fêngshui is strong. The poor, of course, have to bury where they can, and quickly too, as their means will not allow them to purchase these expensive burying lots ; neither would it be convenient for them to permit the dead to remain unburied for any considerable time. When a place has been discovered that is found to enrich the family that owns it, desperate attempts are often made by stronger clans to wrest it from them.

Some of the fiercest and most deadly feuds that have turned a certain district into a battlefield, where hundreds on each side have come out to wage war upon each other, have been stirred up by the desire to possess some piece of land that the geomancers have said will bring wealth and honour to those who possess it. It is an extraordinary fact, however, that, until a man has been buried in the ground, it is of no more value than the commonest lot of land in the district. It is only when it has been turned into a grave that the spirits awake to a sense of the power they possess of enriching or of injuring human life.

An illustration of what I mean by these lucky spots will explain my meaning better than any amount of description. The case is that of a Chinese merchant who is exceedingly wealthy. His business transactions are always on a large scale, and he is noted for the keenness with which he can make a bargain and his foresight in seeing what goods are likely to have a good sale and bring in large profits. He has a large and powerful physique, and an overmastering, browbeating manner with him, that makes it unpleasant to have any discussion with him on matters upon which he does not agree with you. Fifty years ago his family was a poor one. It lived in a low, mean house, and the few little fields it owned were barely sufficient to meet the commonest wants of every-day life. About that time the English ships approached Amoy with the purpose of bombarding the forts that defended it. The common people were in the wildest alarm, for the most outrageous stories had been circulated by the mandarins as to the ferocity of the English. They were represented as having a savage thirst for human blood. They would gouge out children's eyes and tear men limb from limb with insane delight. Every one that could fly did so, and amongst these was the family of the man I am describing. Just before they fled his father died and, in the hurry and confusion, a grave was dug by the roadside and the body was hastily interred.

After a time it was found that the English were by no means the monsters they had been represented, and the family I have referred to returned to their deserted home. The son now engaged a geomancer to find for him a lucky spot where he might bury his father, in the hope that he would bring prosperity upon the home that he had left in such poverty. I may explain that the original place where he was buried was at the junction of three roads, one of them being the main one, the other two branching off diagonally from it. When the geomancer came to examine the spot where the father lay, he started back with astonishment, and said : " You do not need to select any other place. You have accidentally lighted upon a situation where the fêngshui elements are exceedingly powerful, and you will find that, ere long, your family will emerge out of its poverty, and you will be a wealthy man. Look at the two roads," he continued, " that diverge from this spot. With the main road they represent exactly a huge pair of scissors. Your father is buried at the strongest point of them, viz., where the button rivets the two blades together. He lies in the very place of power, and all the forces of fêngshui are concentrated there and are working for the prosperity of your family."

It did actually turn out as the geomancer predicted. From this time fortune changed, and wealth gradually began to flow into the home. A magnificent mansion now occupies the place where the hovel used to stand. All this is put down to the dead man that lies beneath the button of the shears, and to the unseen forces that play about his dust. Men never dream of attributing it to the ability of the son, nor to his strong, determined will and thorough business habits. These are, no doubt, allowed to be factors in the case, but they would have utterly failed, men say, but for the shapeless hands and the unseen mind that have been directing the streams of good fortune into his life.

One of the greatest curses of this land is fêngshui, for it has absolutely prevented the development of the vast mineral resources that lie concealed within it. Until recently men dared not open coalmines for fear of disturbing the dragon that lay beneath. There are large districts in many parts of the empire that abound with coal and iron that have lain undisturbed for ages, whilst the people are suffering from the extremest poverty. The sound of the pickaxe would disturb the repose of the dragon, and the shovel and the spade would dig into the spirits that cluster in the earth, and the most terrible disasters would be the result. Famine and pestilence and desolating wars would come upon the land ; and so the people starve whilst wealth that would enrich every home near by is kept sealed up from the nation. It was amusing to watch the consternation that seized upon all classes of people when it was first proposed to construct telegraphs in China. There were two dangers to be anticipated, viz., the digging of holes in the ground for the posts and stretching the long line of wires across the country. The first would irritate the dragon and the other spirits that have their homes below the ground, and the second would fill with dismay the spirits of the upper air, and so enrage them against men. It was, indeed, a daring venture for those who conceived the idea, for every trouble and disaster that might happen along its course would be put down to it. If a child died of measles, or a pig fell into a ditch and was drowned, or the crops failed, the people would say the telegraph poles and wires were the cause.

On one occasion, whilst the engineers were constructing the line in a certain place, the wires had to be stretched over a house that lay directly in their course. The owner came out in great distress and begged them to divert it a few yards so as to allow it to pass by on either side. They told him it was impossible to consent to this. He then went down on his knees, and in the most piteous tones begged and entreated them to have mercy upon him and save him from utter ruin. His prayer was again denied, and he was compelled to wait the sad fate that he felt sure would come upon him. A few months after this event his wife had twin sons, which he at once put down to the kindly intervention of the wires that hummed and sang over his house. They had turned out to be a powerful fêngshui, that instead of disaster had brought him two sons. The story got abroad, and for miles around the people envied him his good fortune and wished that the line had travelled over their homes.

Fêngshui is a superstition that has been incalculably disastrous to the whole of this great empire of China, for there is nothing that has so retarded the progress of the nation and kept vast districts in poverty. There are districts, for example, that abound with the finest kinds of coal, yet the people there are in the most abject poverty, and every year large numbers have to emigrate to other regions in order to save themselves from starvation. The mineral wealth that lies underneath the poor fields, from which they drag the rice and potatoes that are not enough to feed the overgrown population, would be abundant enough to fill the homes with plenty, to set factories at work, and to change the hunger-stricken people into happy, contented citizens ; but no one dare put a spade into the ground lest he should dig into the dragon's back and so stir up the passions of this implacable monster, who would wreak his vengeance by hurling plague and pestilence into the homes of the people.

In a certain mountain region with which I am acquainted, an English engineer, more than twenty years ago, reported that there was a considerable hill that was mainly composed of iron of a superior quality, in quantities sufficient to meet the demands of the whole empire for a thousand years. This report was communicated to some of the leading men in the region, with the result that a few of the more enlightened of them were anxious that work should at once be commenced, smelting furnaces erected, and skilled iron workers from England engaged, so that the poverty of ages might vanish and the people cease from the long fight with starvation. But the dread of the fêngshui paralysed the great mass of the people, and though they longed for wealth, comfort and ease, and to be delivered from the intolerable strain of want, they dared not move a step, lest they should arouse the invisible forces that guarded the coal and the iron against them. The years have gone by, but the mineral wealth still lies undeveloped. An English company offered to buy the land at a most remunerative rate. They also guaranteed to pay all working expenses, to employ the native labour of the place at good wages, and to give constant work to the hands they would necessarily have to employ. These were fascinating inducements, but the people shrank before the fear of spirits, so to-day the coal is untouched and the iron unsmelted, whilst the men and the women wage a fierce and hopeless fight against poverty.

It is this same fêngshui that stops the quarrying of stone, so that the people of a region where the hills abound with granite have to go miles away to some other district to obtain, at considerable toil and expense, material with which to build their houses. Junks put out to sea and travel along the coast, and by and by news comes that a storm has suddenly arisen and wrecked them, and all because they have consciously or unconsciously violated some of the rules of fêngshui, and the spirits in their fury have sent the great winds upon them and raised the mighty seas that have hurled them to the bottom of the ocean.

Any one who has visited a Chinese town cannot but have noticed how all the houses are pretty much of the same height, and how rarely one sees any one that towers above the rest. One begins to wonder why there should be such a monotonous uniformity throughout the miles of streets along which he wanders, and why the Chinese mind should be satisfied that each house should be just about the height of those of the neighbours. The secret of this puzzle again lies with fêngshui. A house largely overtopping another would be a danger to the others round about. The winds from the four quarters would gather around it, and the vagrant spirits that wander aimlessly through the air would throw their influences into it. The result would be most disastrous to the buildings lower than it. Men would, consequently, die suddenly of mysterious diseases ; pigs would be attacked with epidemics, the hens would cease to lay, children would stumble and break their necks, and business would dwindle away. The whole neighbourhood would rise in arms and would never remain satisfied until the obnoxious story had been pulled down and the house made level with the rest.

There is no doubt but that the ramifications of fêngshui are very extensive, and subjects that originally did not belong to it in the early conception of it have been dragged in and placed within its grip. This is due to the ignorance of the Chinese. Many things occur in ordinary life that can easily be accounted for without the interposition of supernatural agency. The Chinese are in an intellectual darkness more dense than that which enshrouded the Middle Ages in Europe, and so, when anything happens that men do not know how to account for, they put it down to this mysterious fêngshui. A child, for example, dies in a certain home, perhaps because it has eaten something that has disagreed with it, or as the result of bad drains. At once the whole family incontinently remove from that house to another, because, it is believed, the fêngshui is bad and may soon cause the death of some other member if they remain in it. A man goes up for his literary examination, and he takes his degree with honour. Scholarship is, of course, credited in a large measure with this, but more potent than all the study he has put into his work is the old dilapidated grave on the hillside, where the spirits have been secretly working on his behalf.

In the awakening that has begun to touch China during the last few years, there are signs that this fatal force that has acted so mischievously on the empire for so many ages is beginning to be discovered to be an impostor, and the supreme powers are making laws and regulations that will ultimately do away with it. The building of telegraphs and railways has been a severe blow to it, and latterly the mining concessions that have been liberally granted by the Government, both to native and foreign companies, will tend to destroy the faith that men had in it. China is a country that abounds in mineral wealth, and when once the power of superstition is removed and these mines can be exploited and developed, a new era of prosperity will have dawned upon wide and extensive districts in this empire.

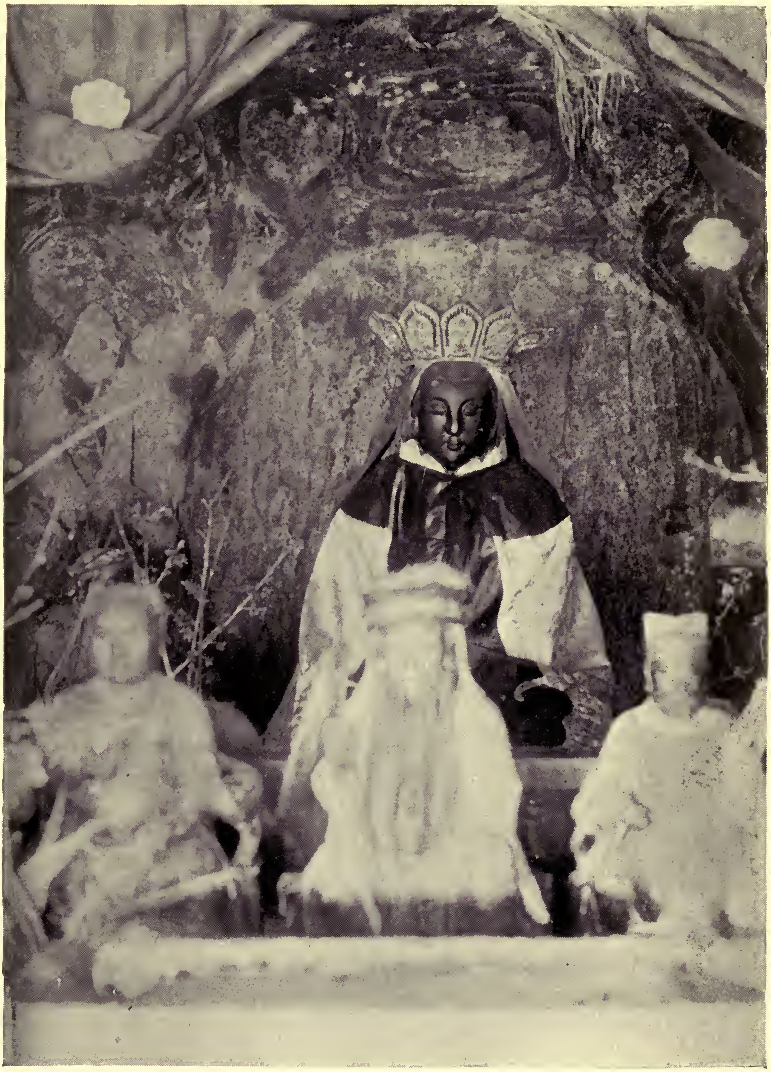
CHAPTER IX

THE SPOKESMAN OF THE GODS

THE practical, every-day, common religion of the Chinese is idolatry, pure and simple. No doubt ancestor worship has the deepest hold upon the hearts of the nation, but it is too profound and too ideal and not quick enough to meet the problems that constantly face the Chinese in their struggle for existence. To provide for this difficulty, idols innumerable have been enshrined in homes and in temples all over the land, which are believed to interfere promptly and without delay in the daily affairs of life, instead of awaiting the slower methods that their dead ancestors are supposed to pursue.

Many of these idols are of Indian origin, as can be seen by their faces, as well as by the liturgies that are used, which are certainly adaptations from the ancient Sanscrit. A large number, on the other hand, are Chinese, being statesmen and warriors and heroes in humble life who have been deified by royal edicts in past ages. All the above are believed to have a special commission from Heaven to control the thousand and one things in the daily life of the nation, just as the Emperor and the countless mandarins administer the civil and political affairs of the empire.

As these idols have not the power of expressing themselves in human language, it has been found necessary to establish a class of men who are called " sorcerers " and who are supposed to be able to interpret the will of the gods to those who come with special requests. Answers have often to be given at once and delay may not be brooked. A man, for example, is going to open a new shop. He has planned to put all his capital into it, but before taking the final step



FOUR FAMOUS IDOLS.

To face p. 119.

he wishes to get the opinion of the idol as to whether the venture will be successful or not. Or a wife, perhaps, is ill with an acute disease that has baffled the skill of the doctors. The husband, full of sorrow and anxiety, comes with throbbing heart and eyes moist with tears to beg the idol to tell him what medicine he shall give her that will cure her.

The wooden god sits there in its shrine with a stern and haughty look upon its face, but no voice comes from those silent lips in reply to the passionate inquiries of those that kneel before it. In these circumstances the sorcerer steps forward, and, repeating certain formulæ, gradually passes into a state of frenzy. He then seems no longer to have any control over himself. He leaps and flings himself about as though he were the most veritable madman that ever escaped from a lunatic asylum. During his paroxysms he pretends that he is inspired by the god, and he pours forth answer after answer, as if under the inspiration of the idol, to the suppliants, who accept all that this designing fellow says as direct responses from the invisible world. There is considerable difficulty in getting men to act as spokesmen, because the position they occupy is considered to be a most disreputable one. Only persons that society looks upon with suspicion will undertake it. Gamblers, opium-smokers, and broken-down characters whose morals are of the shadiest description are the choice materials out of which sorcerers are manufactured. No scholar nor respectable person ever condescends to demean himself by entering their ranks, and hardly any disgrace could fall upon a family that would bring such a stain upon it as that of having one of its members in this disreputable profession.

In order to be qualified to become a sorcerer a certain weird and uncanny ceremony has to be performed, after which the man becomes the interpreter of the wishes of the idol, and through him it communicates its answers to its worshippers. As very few foreigners have ever had an opportunity of witnessing such a ceremony, I will now describe one that I was lucky enough to be present at. The time was a very dark and stormy night. The clouds overhead were black and heavy and flew by in frightened masses before the gale. Darkness lay around on everything, except the great banyan-tree in front of the temple where the weird rites were to be performed, and that was so mystified by the dim light that shone inside that it seemed like a huge spectre that had come to play its pranks and freeze men's hearts with fear.

The interior of the temple was in deepest shadow, which was rendered all the more conspicuous by the flickering of several diminutive oil lamps that showed where the door was. As if to make the scene all the more sombre, a fluttering, hesitating tallow candle was stuck up close to the chief idol, that, with a haughty, imperious air, seemed to be looking with profound contempt upon the scene before it. Whether intended or not, the effect produced by this imperfect light was very striking, and just such as to harmonise with the drama that was being played inside the front door. It revealed enough of the god to let us know that he was there, whilst the shadows that clung around him seemed to exaggerate his form and give him a supernatural and awe-inspiring appearance.

Outside the narrow line along which the candle threw its uncertain glimmer the mystery became all the more intense, because of the deep gloom that brooded there. On each side of the idol could be seen spectral, shadowy-looking figures that seemed to be concealing themselves in the gloom that lay beyond the dim, uncertain light that flickered from the candle. One was absorbed in profound thought, with a face so calm that it would appear that no passion ever ruffled the heart within. Another was standing with hands outstretched as though in the very act of giving its judgment to some suppliant who had appealed to it. Close beside it was another, apparently in a death struggle with some unseen foe that was endeavouring to rob it of its life. Its body writhed in agony and the muscles of its twisted, distorted arms were swollen and knotted, whilst its face was covered with a defiant look that showed how unconquered was the spirit within. These figures, I knew, were the attendant spirits of the chief god that are supposed to carry out his orders and at the same time do a little business on their own account; for, Chinese like, it is believed that their connection with the god has given them a certain amount of power that can be exerted on behalf of those that worship them.

The chief interest, however, centred round four men who stood facing the idol in various attitudes just inside the main entrance of the temple. Prominent amongst these was the man who was about to be converted into a spokesman. He was the very last man that one would have suspected that an intelligent god would have anything to do with—that is, if he had any regard for his own reputation as a spiritual being. He had a very suspicious look of the opium den and gambling hell, and had very much the appearance of the loafers that hang about such unsavoury places.

One could see that he was a thoroughly uneducated man, and his whole bearing and dress showed that he belonged to the lower middle class. It was the absence of all signs of spirituality, however, in his face that struck me most. He was the kind of man that no honest business man would care to employ, and he was just the sort of character that housewives would guard their hen-houses against to prevent their poultry from being raided. Standing on his right and slightly facing him was a coarse-looking fellow, with a strongly-marked, paganish countenance, the master of the ceremonies, who kept chanting the words of the incantations that were to entice the spirit of the god to enter the man by his side. In front of him were two men with gongs, which they struck in a slow, rhythmical fashion, so as to act as an accompaniment to the loud and monotonous tones of the voice that rang through the building.

I watched with keen attention the man who was standing with bowed head, silently waiting for the coming of the spirit. The latter was evidently in no hurry to respond to the call of the low-featured master of ceremonies, for there was no indication that any of the solemn appeals and beating of gongs had made even the slightest impression upon it. The Chinese, however, is a patient being, and acts as though he had a thousand years before him in which to plan to carry out his purpose. After a considerable time, during which the god still seemed unmoved, the chanting was slightly quickened and each word was uttered in a sharp, staccato tone.

Listening attentively one could catch the words, "Come, thou controller of the spirits, come quickly. Come, too, ye captains and generals of the shadowy hosts and slay and scatter the multitudes of demons that fill the air. Come, thou prince of the Pearly Emperor, who became a mighty monarch by ten generations of incarnations. Come with the golden elixir of life that makes the stars shine brightly, and that fills the earth with its glory. Come and drive into oblivion the devils that are bringing disease upon man, and plague and pestilence. Come with thy golden sword, and cut in pieces the elves and goblins. Come with thy shadowy troops, with lightning speed as the spirit that drags the chariot of the thunder, come and delay not. Come! come! and enter the man that is waiting for thy presence." Each word was jerked out as though it had been propelled by a charge of dynamite, and the gongs, in order to be in rhythm, were struck with a corresponding energy that made the temple re-echo with their unmusical sounds.

At length a slight movement was observed in the principal figure in the weird scene, which the others were quick to observe. The voice of the chanter was at once raised, and the gongs clanged out their noisy harmonies to hasten on the action of the god. In a very few minutes the man began to sway from side to side, as though the spirit had him in its grip and was playing some mad pranks with him. The chanting was now uttered in a still higher tone, and what had been entreaty up to this time now became almost a command. The speaker evidently felt that success depended upon the part he was to play, and so with flashing eyes and a face full of nervous passion the coarse-looking fellow seemed to be ordering the unseen spirit to carry out his imperious commands.

In the meanwhile a wonderful change had come over the coming spokesman. The cold, phlegmatic look of the Chinese had vanished and in its place leaped a world of passion that blazed within the man. He was no longer a dull, unemotional being, but a man full of fire and tempest and storm. With wild gestures and a look of madness in his face he leaped and jumped about the gloomy floor of the temple. Louder beat the gongs and stronger and more imperative became the voice of the chanter. The scene really was most exciting. At length the man, exhausted by his violent efforts, fell to the ground, where he remained insensible for some time. The ceremony had been most successful, and from this time forth all revelations of the gods must be made through this man who was believed to be inspired by them.

The power of the medium is maintained simply by the gross superstition of the people, who are prepared to believe in any statement that he may be pleased to make. His position is always a safe one, no matter how his predictions may turn out. If they are found to be true, he gains considerable credit with the people. If they are not, the blame is mostly laid upon the worshipper for his want of faith in the idol, who thus could not act, or upon some change of purpose in the god. In any case, no blame is attached to him.

A Chinese with whom I was acquainted was one day seized with a severe fever. His son, who was living at a distance, was written to and urged to come at once if he wished to see his father alive. Distressed with this startling news, he went to the nearest temple and asked the sorcerer to get the idol to inform him if it were possible for him to reach his father before he died. The man, having worked himself up into a state of frenzy so as to qualify himself to be the mouthpiece of the god, assured the son that unless he reached home by a certain time he would never see his father alive. Now it happened that, after the dispatch of the son, the fever succumbed before a few powerful doses of quinine, and by the date that the medium said he would be dead he was on the highway to recovery. The son, of course, was delighted with this, and when he afterwards twitted the sorcerer with the mistake he had made the latter calmly replied : " The death of your father had been fully determined upon, but out of pity for you the idol decided to let him live. You ought, therefore, to make an extra offering to it for its mercy in sparing one so dear to you."

Beside the special duties connected with the temples, these sorcerers pretend to have great power over evil spirits that are commonly supposed to be roaming round the world, always bent on destroying the happiness of men wherever they are met. These spirits are the ghosts of men who once lived on earth, and recollecting the sorrows and injuries they endured when they were men they wish to be revenged for the wrongs they once suffered. They consequently send sickness and death into families, and cause failures in business, and make the pigs die and the hens to suddenly droop and perish of a sickness that is incurable.

If a plague devastates some particular district in a town, the people treat the suggestion that impure water and bad drainage are the cause with the utmost contempt. "What possible connection can there be between the health of a city and its bad smells?" they contemptuously inquire. China, they declare, has never been without these. The present ones are the lineal descendants of those that started in the heroic age of the empire. The Chinese have always lived amongst smells. They played as children with them close by. They have grown up strong and healthy amongst them. They are part of the social life of the people, and without them the empire might be endangered. Epidemics, the people declare, are caused by malign spirits, and the cure for these is not sanitary measures and sweeping of drains and copious supplies of carbolic, but the arts of the sorcerer, who will soon put to flight the most obstinate and pigheaded of the invisible fraternity.

When the services of this man are required he dresses himself up in full fighting costume to wage battle with the unseen foes. In order to impress the people with a sense of the seriousness of the conflict, he comes forth in the most barbaric style. He knows that as he has really no visible antagonist that he can slay before the gaping crowds any victory that he may gain must be owing to his skill in acting a part that shall make the flesh creep and give men the horrors as they look on at the encounter with the malign foes of mankind.

At a fixed time, which has been duly specified to the dwellers round a certain temple, the sorcerer, who has been waiting for the gathering of the spectators, suddenly leaps out from a dark room in the back of the building where he has been preparing his make-up for the great conflict. He is stripped to the waist, ready to perish if needs be, though dying is the very last thought he has in his mind. The Chinese are natural-born actors, and so this man is just in his element now, all the more so as he knows that he is perfectly safe.

In his right hand he grasps a huge sword that he has recently been sharpening and in his left a black flag, on which seven stars are emblazoned. These latter are believed to have a baneful influence on the demons. To add to the fierceness of his looks a short knife is stuck into his right cheek, and the handle hangs dangling down towards his neck.

No sooner has he got outside into the open space in front of the temple than he gets into the most furious passion. This represents the anger of the god at the infernal spirits daring to molest its worshippers. He flies about as if in a frenzy and makes backhanded lunges with the sword, not only at the invisible forces in the air but also at his own naked back. There is a method, however, in this last that is exceedingly amusing to any one who is not under the influence of superstition. Every time he makes his lunge at his unprotected back one's heart almost stops beating and a great fear comes over one lest the sharp, gleaming sword should slash into it and wound him with its fatal stroke. After a few mad efforts of this kind we begin to see that there is a method in the man's wild attempt to murder himself, and that there is really no danger after all from these murderous lunges.

As we look more carefully at the scene, we discover two men dodging behind him with long sticks in their hands. These men keep their eyes riveted on the movements of the sorcerer, and every time he strikes viciously at his back they cunningly interpose their sticks so that the sword cannot reach his body. Wherever he goes they follow, and in whatever direction he darts and wriggles and plays the mountebank they must be as prompt and agile as he, so as to be ready to render the stroke of the sword innocuous. After a time, when he has made a perfect fool of himself, but has deeply impressed the crowd that has collected to witness this strange encounter with supernatural powers, the sorcerer addresses the spirits in language anything but choice or polite, and warns them that if they do not at once leave the district they will be afflicted with such awful pains and torments that existence will be made one long misery to them. He then slashes the air in all directions as if to give them a hint of what they may expect in the future if they refuse to obey. With these words of threatening and denunciation the exhibition comes to an end.

A most remarkable thing in this grotesque business is that it never seems to occur to the Chinese, who are conspicuous for their common sense in the ordinary matters of life, that the spirits should not have had wit enough to disperse beyond the reach of this sorcerer's sword, but should have been simple enough to collect in this one space where they would come under the control of his influence. The fact is, the Chinese, who is as keen and as shrewd as any man in the world, seems to give up all his powers of thought and of logic when he comes face to face with superstition.

By and by the epidemic abates and the popular belief in the idol is confirmed ; whilst more grist is brought to the mill of the sorcerer, who is credited with being a powerful agent in bringing about such a happy result. Still, the position of the spokesman of the gods is by no means an enviable one. The man is despised and scorned by society generally, and it is the popular belief that his connexion with the idols, instead of bringing a blessing upon him, actually conveys a curse. As time goes on the members of his family gradually pine away and die. The wife, perhaps, sickens, and no incantation or frenzied appeal to the gods can save her. Then a son, beloved of his father, falls into a well and is drowned. Another child is attacked with fever and he passes away in delirium. The man is now left wifeless and childless, and men shake their heads and say, "Ah! Heaven is just. The man has deceived many, and has brought sorrow upon many a home, and now a just retribution has fallen upon himself."

It is astonishing that men of dissolute lives and absolutely without moral character should be allowed so prominent a position in the popular religion of the people. The lives of these sorcerers are well known. They very frequently cause the death of people by prescribing medicines that hasten their end. No action is taken by the authorities or by their relatives to bring punishment upon them. They are excused because they are said to be under the influence of the gods, who inspired them to write their fatal prescriptions. No one dares express any disapproval of their action, lest some calamity should incontinently be hurled upon him by the angry gods, who are believed to be a very passionate race, and easily moved to take revenge. Idolatry is often supposed to be a happy kind of religion, which allows every one to live in a free-and-easy style and act and think precisely as he likes. This is a mistake. It is, on the contrary, a tremendous tyranny that dominates and terrifies men with the awful dread of summary pains and penalties that may at any moment be inflicted upon them through the agency of such a disreputable character as the sorcerer, who claims that he holds a brief from the spirits to act as their deputy amongst men.

A Nemesis sometimes, however, does fall upon these scamps, and then there is no pity from any one for them. On one occasion, one of these gentry had been called upon by a sick man to inquire of a certain idol what medicine he should take for the complaint from which he was suffering. The sorcerer, having gone through certain incantations, became inspired by the god, and in the midst of his frenzy asked it what prescription he should write for the man who was ill. Suddenly he seized a pen and dashed out a formula which he handed to the man, and told him to take it to the chemist and have it made up. The man hurried away with it to the nearest shop, but when the druggist examined the prescription he was horrified and declared that the main ingredient was a most deadly poison and that enough of that had been prescribed to kill half a dozen men.

The man got frightened and hastened back to the sorcerer and repeated to him what the chemist had said. The spokesman of the god, who was a rough, coarse fellow, and of a domineering and brow-beating disposition, expressed, in very homely but sulphurous language, his indignation that any one should dare to doubt the integrity of the god, or dream that he would make a mistake such as would endanger the life of any of his devotees. He declared, in most emphatic language, that the druggist was a wooden-headed fool, who had not a particle of imagination, nor a soul that knew how to grasp the inspiration of the god who had designed by an extraordinary display of his power to heal the sick man of his disease. But he would show him that the idol whose spokesman he was was a god that could deliver those who trusted him, and to prove this he himself would take the dose that was said to be so dangerous a one. In spite of the protestations of the chemist, he swallowed the whole of the prescription, and in the course of a few hours he died in the greatest possible agonies.

One would naturally suppose that this would greatly shake the faith of the people in the god, but this is not so. The apparent failure of an idol does not seem to influence them in the smallest degree. The death of the sorcerer, they said, was due to his own defective moral character and not to any want of power in the god, for even had the sick man taken the medicine that killed the former, the idol would still have devised means to have rescued him from death. No one ever dreams of questioning either the power or the motives of the numberless idols scattered throughout the land, and, consequently, the whole tribe of priests and sorcerers have very little fear of their position being assailed.

The spokesman of the gods is no outcome of the benevolent teaching of Buddhism. The founder of that system would never have deigned to recognise such a charlatan and impostor. Human happiness was too dear to him to tolerate such cruelties and miseries as he often is the means of bringing on men and women. The teachings of Buddha, so full of tenderness and compassion, exist now only in books. The masses know nothing of them. The vast majority of the priests never read nor study them, and the sorcerers are too illiterate to attempt to understand them. And thus religion is handed over to priests who have no enthusiasm, and whose lives are stained by many vices, and to the low-class sorcerers, whose profession is a disgrace, and who can never show a single virtue to lead men to a higher faith and a nobler life. The one power that is needed in China to-day is the Divine Man, Christ Jesus, whose life is an inspiration to the world, and whose mission was "to seek and to save the lost."

CHAPTER X

THE TEMPLE OF THE EMPEROR OF THE CITY

THERE is one temple in every walled city in the empire that stands out prominently from every other one in the district. The rest deal with life in its ordinary humdrum methods. This has sterner work to do, as its business is with rascality and cheating, and those shadier forms of human life that respectable people and even idols, such as the goddess of mercy, the god of war, and such like, do not care to have much to do with. People, for example, with common and what might be called respectable diseases apply to any of the numerous temples that are to be found everywhere ; but madness and palsy and plague, that are supposed to be the work of evil spirits, come within the scope of the City Emperor.

He is a knowing customer is this god, who can fathom the intricacies of crime, and meet the wiles and cunning tricks of men who are walking in the crooked ways of wickedness and depravity, such as none of the other more simple-minded and unsuspecting idols can do. But let us visit the temple of this popular idol, and see for ourselves the kind of business that is going on every day in it.

It is situated in a narrow, dirty street, in the midst of dilapidated, frowsy-looking houses, with ancient smells that have such a concentrated essence of their own that our hands naturally seek our pockets to extract our handkerchiefs for immediate use. The main entrance is an imposing one and is constructed after the manner of the mandarins' yamêns,[1] with huge central doors and side entrances for common use. These

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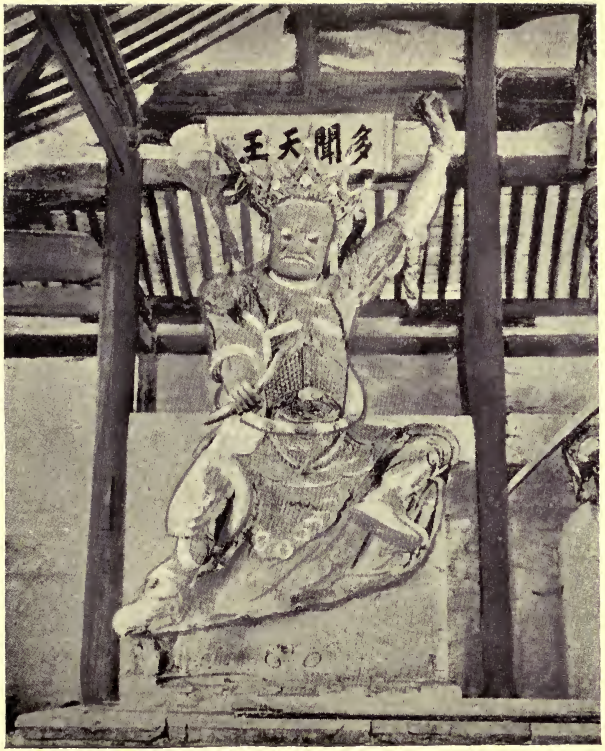
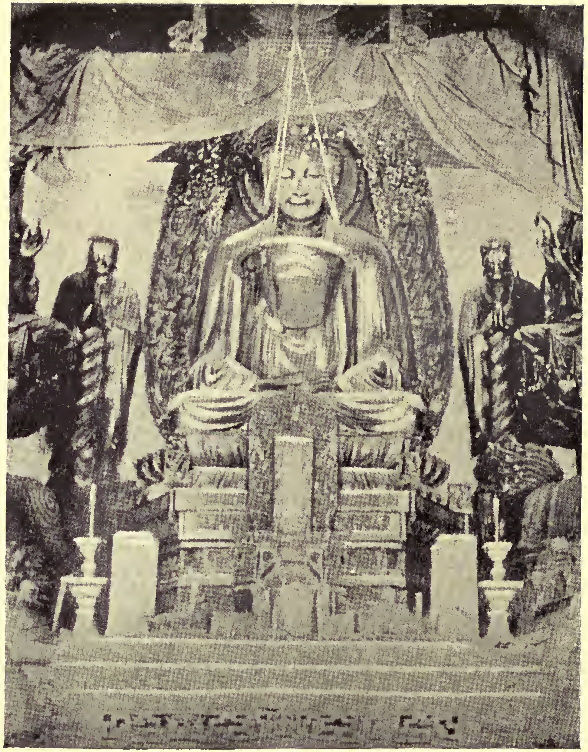
[1] A yamên contains the mandarin's Law Courts, as well as his own private residence.



A CHINESE IDOL.



AN IMAGE OF BUDDHA.

suggest the semi-official character of the building, where cases are tried and where lawsuits are settled by the presiding god within.

A scene suggestive of the character of idolatry and its moral influence on the people meets us as we ascend the steps to enter the building. Four men are seated on the ground, close up to the massive doors, engaged in gambling. Their eyes are glued on the cards, and their looks are absorbed as though they were going through some mental process by which they were trying to discover the hands that the others held. I speak to them and ask them if they are not afraid that the god within will punish them for the disrespect done to his temple and for their violation of law. They take no notice whatever of my question, but with faces stern and fixed they gaze upon the cards they hold in their hands, just as though their fortunes and their very lives depended upon them. I repeat my inquiry, but I am met with the same stolid silence, when a bystander, amused at this little comedy, with grinning face and eyes sparkling with fun, says to me: "You are a stranger here and evidently do not understand our ways. These men, before they began their game, went and made it right with the god by a bribe, so you need not be afraid that he will be offended at their card-playing. The man who wins has promised a good offering to the idol, and so he is perfectly willing that the gambling should go on in front of his temple."

On entering by one of the side doors, we come upon twelve figures carved in wood, nearly as large as life. They are the attendants or policemen of the god, and the detectives he employs in the ferreting out of crime, and in bringing criminals before his bar to receive the punishment due for their misdeeds. They are a weird-looking group, and meant to strike terror into the hearts of men. Time and weather have worked sad havoc with most of them, for they have a look about them that suggests the need of a carpenter and painter to make them fit to appear in respectable society.

Passing by these staring, hideous-looking objects, we cross a large courtyard, and find ourselves in the presence of the idol. If his attendants at the door fare badly, the same cannot be said of their superior. The image, which is placed on a raised platform, is beautifully gilt and has the appearance of being well cared for. The face is grave-looking and inclined to sternness. It has the look of a man who has a perplexing case before him, and about which there are points that excite his indignation. This state of mind may indeed be said to be a chronic one, for all the cases that come before him are of a decidedly shady character, and would not bear the light of day upon them.

Immediately in front of him there is the full-sized figure of a man with a grave and scholarly look, sitting at a table with pen in hand, absorbed in writing down something evidently of great importance. This is the private secretary of the god, and he is recording in characters that will never perish the crimes and misdeeds of the men that appear in this dread court, with all the evidence against them. This is all supposed to be passed on to Hades, where the prince of the underworld will make arrangements for a very warm reception of them by and by.

This Emperor of the City is popularly supposed to be the great avenger of all wrongs. He is in direct communication with the Chinese Pluto, who has commissioned him to act as his deputy amongst men, and who is preparing various kinds of punishments for those whom he condemns in the other world, in addition to what the poor wretches have to endure in this. It is fully believed that he is never appealed to in any case of wrong or injustice where he does not unmercifully punish the transgressor. He has a variety of ways in which he does this. Sickness, perhaps, is sent into the family of the culprit. This is a gentle hint that the god is moving, and if repentance be not shown worse things will soon happen. Or, perhaps, his business begins to decline, or some member of the family dies. Disaster after disaster fall upon the home in quick succession till it is finally exterminated.

Men look upon these judgments as direct visitations from the god for great wrong done by perhaps the head of a family or some other member of it. The idol believes in the " law of righteousness," and it spares no rank nor condition in life. With unfaltering steps it marches on to judgment, and no combination of friends can avail to avert the doom of the man whose wrongs have been brought formally before its notice.

No sooner do we come into the presence of the god than several priests emerge from an inner room and gather round us. They are dressed in long and very loose slate-coloured robes that reach nearly to their feet. Their heads are shaven, and are as bare as the palm of one's hand. The impression that they make upon us is not by any means a favourable one. If ever the passions of men's hearts come out, and reveal themselves upon their faces, they have certainly done so here. Morally, they seem to be of a lower type than the men upon the streets, or of the crowd that has followed us into the temple to see what we are going to do there.

How could they be otherwise? The greater part of the time they are unoccupied. They are extremely illiterate, and they have not the restraints of home life to keep them moderately pure, for when a man becomes a priest he must give up father and mother, and if he be married, wife and children, and live a solitary life, with no noble ambition and no stimulus to a life of devotion and self-sacrifice to help him.

As we are sitting talking to them and sipping the tea they have courteously had an attendant bring us, a man comes in cautiously and hesitatingly across the courtyard. Slowly, and in a shy and half-frightened manner, he comes up to where the idol is seated. His face is a pleasant one, and now and again a smile flits across it through sheer nervousness, and gives it such a sunny, genial look that we feel our sympathies drawn out towards him.

He is a countryman, as can easily be seen by the cut of his clothes and his brown, sunburnt features. He is dressed in his very best and his head has been shaved, and as he draws near to the god, in order to pay respect to it, he gives a sudden touch to his queue that is wound around his head, and in an instant it falls down his back. This act is one of respect, for to address a superior with the queue twisted round the crown of the head is a great breach of etiquette. In his hand he holds a bundle of incense sticks, which he proceeds to light and insert in an incense dish lying in front of the idol. He has also a long string of paper ingots, representing large sums of gold and silver, which he sets on fire.

These acts are preparatory to the real business that has brought him here, and are intended to propitiate the god. It is believed in China that the true way to reach any one's heart is through a gift, a present of some kind, and the larger the better. Justice is administered on this principle in almost every court in this great empire. This has been the case from time immemorial, so that the thought has sunk into the great public heart till it has become a prime article of faith and practice in every department of life.

Idols, of course, are but deified men, and, whatever they may have lost in their transition from earth to the other world, it is never dreamed that the passion for a bribe has been at all affected. It is for this reason that the man has brought his incense and his ingots representing considerable sums of money. It is true that the whole has not cost him sixpence, but he believes that by some hocuspocus or other the tawdry pieces of paper will be transmuted into real gold and silver by the time they reach the treasury of the god, and will thus incline him to grant his petition.

After this preliminary performance, the man drew out a long document, which contained his petition to the idol, and proceeded to read it in a loud, clear voice. This told the story how that when his father was dying, he had left the farm and the homestead to himself and a younger brother. This latter had recently fallen into evil ways, and had taken to gambling and opium-smoking. Running short of money, he had forged a deed and sold the whole of the property to a rich man in the neighbourhood. The petitioner had begged and entreated this wealthy individual not to take advantage of his brother's wickedness, but to refuse to have anything to do with the purchase of land that his brother had no right to sell, yet in vain. An appeal had been made to the local mandarin for redress, but the rich man's bribes had perverted the judgment, and now his only hope was in the justice of the god.

He then went on to implore the idol to avenge him by sending down upon the rich man every known disaster that has ever turned human life into a howling wilderness of sorrow. He prayed that lingering disease might come into his family and smite every member of it ; that his wife might be plagued with madness, and his children become vagabonds ; that his riches might flee, and poverty of the direst kind pursue him till life should end amidst rags and destitution ; and that his life should become a burden to him, so that death, with all the gloom that heathen belief throws around it, should be looked forward to as the happiest thing that could happen to him.

After he had finished reading his formal complaint, which was drawn up precisely as an accusation in the civil courts would have been, he burned it in the presence of the idol, and bowing gravely to it, he looked round with his nervous smile upon the spectators who had been listening to him, and after a few moments' hesitation slowly left the temple. He never expected to get back his farm and his home again. These were irretrievably lost to him, but he had the satisfaction of having, as he believed, set in motion a power that would never rest nor sleep till it had executed dire vengeance upon the man who had wronged him.

We continue to sit and sip our tea with the priests. As we get better acquainted with each other, I find my heart warming towards them, and the feeling of repugnance gradually subsiding. I talk to them about God, and about Christ, the Saviour of the world, and as they get interested, their hearts are moved by the story, the wicked look melts in their eyes, and the bold expression that repelled us at first gradually softens down till their faces become gentle and sympathetic. Everything else is for the moment forgotten whilst I dwell upon the tenderness and love of God. The idols close by seem to be silently listening, and the secretary, with pen in hand, appears as though he had stayed his work in the absorbing interest of the story that is being told to these priests.

There were no objections made to our preaching the gospel ; indeed, they frequently expressed their approval of the various points that seemed to touch their hearts, and the crowd that had gathered thickly round to hear what we were saying gave very free utterance to their opinion that the doctrines we preached were in accordance with the principles of Heaven, and therefore worthy the acceptance of all men.

But suddenly the stillness of the temple is broken by the sounds of the voices of a number of people, and immediately a crowd comes trooping in with an excited, expectant air, as though they expected to witness something that would be more than ordinarily interesting. They march past the broken-down-looking figures at the door, across the courtyard, and halt not till they gather tumultuously in front of the idol.

It is astonishing with what irreverence the Chinese behave in their temples and in the presence of their gods. Their voices are not hushed, nor do they walk with silent tread, nor show any signs that they feel they are in the presence of beings that have to be reverenced or feared. They talk loudly, and gesticulate and wrangle and use foul language just as though they were met in some public place where men could act precisely as they liked, without the fear of being taken to task for anything they might do.

Conspicuous amongst the crowd that flock into every available space in front of the idol are two men, who are to be the actors in a very exciting and dramatic ceremony. They are both of them serious and sober-looking, and are evidently impressed with the gravity of the circumstances that have brought them so prominently before the public. One of them is a middle-aged man, evidently a shopkeeper in a fairly good way of business, and the kind of man that one would feel inclined to trust. He has large, expressive features, not a beauty by any means, but certainly not repulsive. His eyes are black and just now snapping with excitement. He is full of nervous passion, which we can see by the varying expressions that flash across his common-sense, homely-looking face.

It appears that he has lately lost a considerable sum of money that he had hidden away in what he considered to be a very secure hiding-place in his house. It was all the spare fortune that he possessed, and it was upon it that he relied as the backbone of his business, upon which he could draw when bills became pressing and creditors urgent in their demands for payment.

One morning he came to take out enough to pay a bill that had been presented, and lo ! to his horror, the whole had disappeared. There was no living soul, he believed, that knew of the whereabouts of the money excepting his assistant. With beating heart and passion on his lips, and fierce revenge gathering in his soul, he demanded from him the stolen money. The latter denied all knowledge of the theft, and to prove his innocence he volunteered to appear before the Emperor and take the dread oath that he was entirely guiltless of the charge that had been made against him.

And now here they stand. The defendant, as I may call him, is a pleasant-faced, nervous-looking man, with not very much intelligence or force of character. Examining him as he stands in front of the crowd, with the grim, stern-looking god gazing down upon him, he does not seem to have the look of a thief. I could hardly imagine that he had the daring and the enterprise to plan the carrying off of so large a sum of money. It is a good sign, too, that he is willing to stand before the tribunal of the god and swear that he is not guilty. It is only sinners and men of iron nerve, and scamps whose consciences have been hardened, that dare to face the awful penalties that the invisible powers would surely exact from them in case of false swearing. He holds a white cock in his hand, which, during this preliminary and miscellaneous talk that was meant for the information of the spectators, makes vigorous struggles to get away. It does not like the crowd, and would much prefer to be in the farmyard than in such a gathering of men.

Incense sticks are now lighted and placed in front of the god and strings of paper money are burnt, so as to incline it to listen patiently to the story now about to be told. The accuser then produces his document, in which he has drawn up his accusation, and in a loud voice reads from it. It tells how he had a sum of money in his house put away carefully in a secret place, and how distressed he was when he came to use it, to find that it had disappeared. He had searched for it, but in vain, as the thief had left no trace behind of his theft. He was fully convinced that no one but the man at his side could have taken it, and, therefore, he implored the god to cause him to restore it to him, or to send down such punishment upon him as would make him a misery to himself and a terror to his neighbours. The document was then burned, and now the formal indictment was in the hands of the unseen spirit that is supposed to reside in the idol.

The defendant then stood forth and declared his perfect innocence of the crime with which he had been charged. A critical observer would have been inclined to believe him from his ingenuous and truth-like appearance, although in China this is not always a test that can be relied upon, for the Chinese have the most remarkable faces in the world, perhaps, for concealing their thoughts. They can tell the most dreadful lies without the least change of colour, or without any ripple of emotion passing over their features to betray the story that lies deeply hidden within their hearts. If possible, they appear more serenely calm and unruffled when with eloquent gesture and pathetic look they are manufacturing some plausible answer to a very grave accusation.

Whilst he is talking he looks agitated, and a pale greenish hue, which might be an indication of guilt, tinges his sallow features. This, however, might be accounted for by the peculiarly solemn circumstances in which he was placed, for the taking of this oath is one of the most dreaded ceremonies in the whole range of Chinese life. After denying that he had anything to do with the stolen money, he proceeds in the most awful language to call down the vengeance of the god upon himself if he has. He prays that sickness may blight his family, that his own life may become a torture to himself, that poverty may hold him in its perpetual grip and the direst sorrows cast their shadows upon and never leave him, and that finally death may suddenly seize upon him, just as happens to the cock, and with one blow of a chopper that he holds in his hand, he strikes off its head, and the poor thing lies quivering on the ground, with its life blood gushing out in red streams from its body.

The scene is terribly weird and gruesome, and in some great painter's hand would make a splendid subject for a picture. The crowd standing silent and absorbed in the crowning act, when the man severs the head of the cock and declares amidst terrible imprecations upon himself that he is innocent of the theft ; the two chief actors in this drama that is being played to-day, with passion and fierce resentment depicted on their faces, as they both appeal to the unseen powers that are believed to right the wrongs of this human life of ours ; and the god, stern and solemn, looking down calmly on the upturned faces of the crowd, whilst the secretary seems absorbed in the process of recording every word that is being uttered in this doubtful case, are scenes that, transferred by the hand of genius to canvas, would produce a picture of startling and abiding interest.

The crowd now begins to disperse. The excitement is over, for the case has passed out of human control and is in the hands of the god. The battered, disreputable figures at the door, though they have never moved from the position they were in when we entered, and their strange, grotesque attitudes are the same, are believed to have already received the commands of their superior and have even now taken their first steps in that silent, relentless pursuit after the thief that shall end in his detection and punishment.

It turned out a few days after the scene I have described, that the real culprit, terrified by the thought of the awful judgments that the man who had been falsely accused had called upon the god to hurl upon him if he were guilty, and fearful that the idol might visit him with these, took measures to restore the money to the owner without revealing his identity. This, however, the latter was not much concerned about. He had recovered his property, and his mind was too happy to care much as to the question how it had disappeared.

He had, however, an important duty now to perform, viz., to appear before the god and stay further proceedings against the man whom he had falsely accused. Until this was done, the accusation, just as in the civil courts, would still be in force against him, as the god was not supposed to be cognisant of the quashing of the case until the petition had been formally withdrawn. He accordingly presented himself before the idol and offering some incense and paper money, he informed it that the money had been recovered, and that now he wished to withdraw the accusation against the man whom he had previously charged with the theft. He also thanked the god for the prompt way in which it had acted on his behalf, and bowing profoundly, left with a grateful heart.

It seems a remarkable thing that so shrewd and intelligent a people as the Chinese should believe that these wooden figures should have such a tremendous power in human life as they ascribe to them. And yet when one reasons out the matter it will not seem so surprising. The fathers of this nation elected ages ago to depose God from His universe, and to put the idols in His place. This they succeeded in doing, but they could not eradicate the profound instinct in every man that leads him to look outside of life to some great Being to whom he may appeal when sorrow comes, and when the heart is crushed with oppression and no help can be found in man to deliver him.

This temple is the only place where an oath of any kind is taken. In no other would it be binding on the conscience of any one. A man would have no objection to swear any number of oaths anywhere else, and he would do so with a light heart even though every one of them was false. The mandarins know this, so in criminal cases where the truth is to be elicited they prefer the judicious use of a stout bamboo rod to an oath. It is more persuasive and does not demoralise the conscience. An oath, however, before the Emperor of the City, with his supernatural surroundings and his dread terrors and the fearful tortures that are believed will follow any false swearing in his court, makes the worst men hesitate.

Many instances are given where reckless swearing has been followed by instant punishment. A remarkable case occurred in a well-known southern city. A rich man had got possession of the ancestral home of a family that had come down in the world. A sudden turn in the wheel of fortune had enriched one of its members and he wished to redeem the property. The rich man refused to give it up, on the plea that it had always belonged to him. An appeal was made to the chief mandarin of the city to compel him to restore it to the rightful owners.

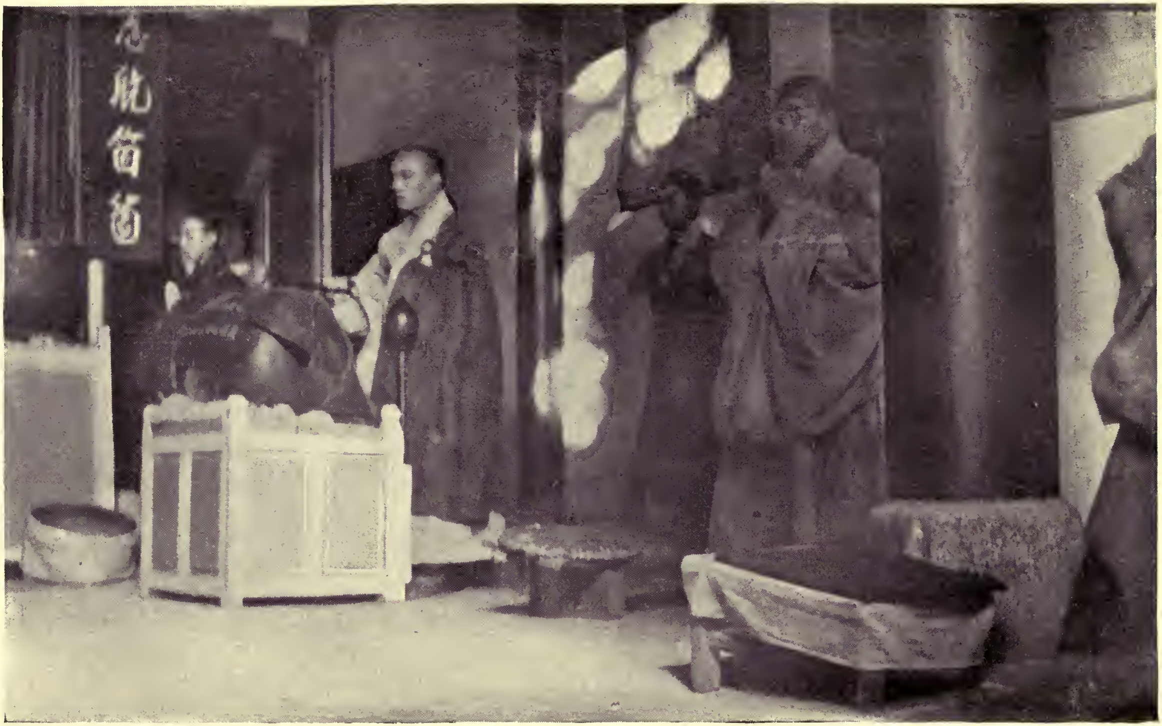
This official happened to be one of those upright men who are found occasionally in office, who was impervious to a bribe, and who was desirous that justice should be done without respect to the position or character of the parties. He foresaw, however, that there would be difficulties in the case, as the rich man had not only wealth to back him but also influential family connections that would enable him to resist any judgment that might be given against him, so he determined to try the lawsuit, not in his own yamên but in the temple of the Emperor.

Accordingly, on the day appointed, he established his tribunal in front of the idol and summoned the parties before him. After the case had proceeded for some time, he said: "I see that there are great difficulties in the way of the settlement of this question. You both produce deeds that seem to show that the house belongs to both of you. This cannot possibly be the case, so I propose that we leave the decision to the god and let him decide who is the rightful owner."

The prosecutor gladly agreed to this suggestion, whilst the rich man for very shame was compelled to consent.

Messengers were sent out to purchase a white cock, and a formal statement of the case was drawn up to be presented to the god. When these preliminaries had been settled, the mandarin moved aside and formally handed over the case to the idol. The rich man then stood forward, document in hand and the cock held by one of his servants. His friends had gathered round him to support his claim, and several of his sons stood near him. The idol, stern and unmoved, looked over the strange gathering with a face that seemed to be filled with indignation, whilst his secretary with head down and eyes fixed upon his paper appeared to be occupied with taking down the evidence. The rich man had proceeded with his oath and had got to the point where he was calling down imprecations on himself and lunging at the cock with the chopper, when all at once there was a scream and then dire confusion and terrified expressions of wonder, for there lay on the ground one of his sons struck down with paralysis. The mandarin now stepped forward and said: "I adjudge that the house be handed over to the prosecutor, for the god has plainly shown to whom it really belongs, and he has also expressed his indignation by striking down the son of the man who falsely claimed that it was his."

This is not a solitary instance where immediate judgment has followed the taking of a false oath. Many stories abound with regard to the special intervention of this god in righting the wrongs of society, and so his temple is looked upon with a considerable amount of dread, and men fear to come under the lash of this dread and most potent Emperor.



EVENSONG IN A BUDDHIST TEMPLE.

To face p.

CHAPTER XI

MOUNTAIN TEMPLES

THE early founders of Buddhism [1] in China must have had a profound love of the beautiful in Nature, and have had at the same time the genius to transmit the same to the long line of priests and abbots that have since succeeded them throughout the empire. We are led to this conclusion by the fact that the priests of the present day show the most exquisite taste in the selection of spots where they build their temples and monasteries, wherever Nature gives them a chance to do so. These shaven, unwashed, and uneducated men, with low and sensual faces, and with no home ties to help to purify their thoughts, seem the very last men to have the artistic faculty within them. And yet, set them to select some place where a future temple is to be built, and, with the instinct of the poet in their hearts and with the eye of the artist who has caught the secret of Nature's charms, they will select the very spot where the soul may spend years of solitude and retirement without being reduced to despair by its surroundings. With the mountain peaks around, the great silent valleys stretching at their feet, the musical echoes of rustling streams, and the inarticulate sounds that Nature is ever uttering, they are enabled to spend the years of a solitude that otherwise might have driven them to despair.

But let me try and describe in as vivid colours as I can one of these Buddhist temples. The time I shall begin with is the hour just before the dawn. Everything is shrouded in darkness, huge boulders that lie around the monastery in fantastic shapes seem like sleeping dragons watching over it during the night. A profound silence reigns everywhere, and the very pines that stand near by are as erect and as motionless as though they were sentinels on guard.

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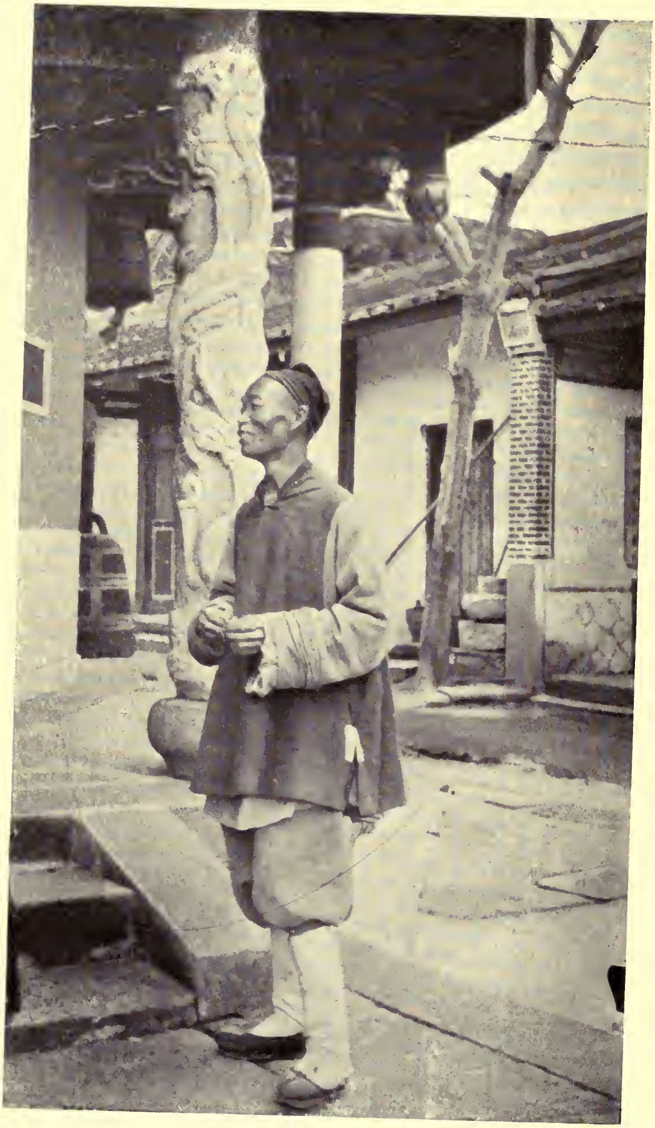
[1] Buddhism was first brought to China in A.D. 60, during the reign of the Emperor Ming, of the Later Han Dynasty.

All at once, as if a miracle had been wrought, the mountain ridge away in the front seems to drop its mantle of darkness, and to become dimly visible. It looks as though some conjurer were at work, for in a moment or two a delicate light that seems to belong to another world trembles shyly at its top. With another wave of his wand sunbeams like golden threads flash through the twilight and weave themselves in and out in various colours. Soon the mountain crests and peaks are crowned with sunlight that slowly travels down the sides of the hill, peers into the dim caverns, and plays around the giant boulders, under which run murmuring rills that are to grow into the rushing, foaming torrent that leaps, with a mad joy in its heart, farther down the mountain-side.

And now the sun rises higher and higher, and his long, flashing rays light up the ravine on the edge of which the temple is perched. What a view it has to look upon this glorious morning! The mountains are bathed in light, the shadows chasing each other like schoolboys along their rugged sides ; the sea in the distance, touched with the morning glory, gleams like a lake of gold, and the far-off peaks seem so distant that they must verily belong to another world—these are the sights upon which the priest may gaze and forget that he is alone.

It would seem, indeed, as though the sun had been putting forth its wondrous powers to make him forget how solitary he is. It cannot be for any one else, for there is no other human being within a mile of him, but this matters not to the sunbeams. They penetrate into his temple and light up the trees as they pass, they gleam about the courtyard and playfully brighten up the wooden gods that send back no response to them, and they seem all the while to be saying: "We will have no dullness where we are. We drive the shadows from the hillsides, and from the great chasms where only we can tread. We touch the clouds, and their sombre looks vanish, and colours tremble through that artists in every



A PRIEST IN THE COURTYARD OF THE "WHITE DEER" TEMPLE.

To face p. 145.

age have tried in vain to put upon their canvas. We come too into the hearts of men and we banish despair ; we turn the sigh into a song, and if men and women would only let us we would make their lives as beautiful as the face of Nature that breaks into smiles every time we flash across it."

These temples usually have a high reputation amongst the people on the plain, because of the wonders they are believed to work in curing disease, in warding off ill-fortune, in bringing prosperity to the home, and in a thousand different ways easing the burdens which press upon the life of the people. All day long solitary figures may be seen ascending the winding road that leads over stone steps, and under overhanging trees, and across rustic bridges, up to the temple where the gods sit in silence within their shrines.

A visit to one of these is full of interest, as it enables one to see the real attitude of the Chinese towards idolatry, and how with unquestioning faith in the wooden images they combine a vast amount of irreverence and disrespect. A very good specimen temple, that stands outside a busy commercial city with over a hundred thousand inhabitants, may be taken as a fair sample of all such similar buildings in China. It is an exceedingly popular one and is known by the name of " The White Deer."

The tradition goes that a fairy who, evidently for very suspicious reasons, had assumed the form of a deer was suddenly caught sight of by a number of dogs and pursued over hill and dale. The magic powers of the fairy seemed to have failed her at this crisis, for her pursuers pressed her so long and so closely that she at last fell exhausted and died just as the hounds reached her.

An artist whose knowledge of perspective was exceedingly deficient, and whose soul had no poetic instinct to picture the scene as Michel Angelo would have done, has tried to perpetuate the story by the figure of a badly-shaped deer, lying in a most ungraceful and inartistic posture on a shelving rock.

The first glimpse of this invariably produces a smile, but the thought that we are in the presence of an attempt at high art quickly sobers us, and we try and look as pleased as though we were looking at the production of one of our most famous sculptors. After a time, as the story got abroad, the people of the city near by subscribed sufficient funds to build a temple to her memory. There is no question but that the deer was a true artist by nature. A more romantic spot where she chose to breathe her last would be difficult to find. It is on the slope of a hill that rises somewhat abruptly from the very edge of the large and populous city. A path that winds through gardens and amongst dilapidated graves leads us gradually up until we stand above the town. Then a series of steps, scarred by time and falling into decay, but whose weakness is disguised by mosses and grass, that with tender hand would hide the signs of age and decay, brings us still higher to a most romantic spot.

Here we have a situation which of all others seems adapted for retirement and meditation. Great rocks and mighty boulders, that Time with her patient hand has smoothed and rounded, lie thickly strewn around in that artless way with which Nature can drape these unwieldy forms into the most artistic attitudes. In the midst of these the temple of " The White Deer " lies enshrined. The beauty of the position is greatly enhanced by the natural grottos that are formed by overhanging rocks and projecting boulders, that cluster around as though the fairies had flung them with graceful hand into positions where they could serve as resting-places for the visitors after their steep climb from the city below. Stone seats have been placed within these where one can sit under the shadow of the rocks, certain that no burning sun shall send its fiery rays to interfere with the delightful coolness that always reigns within.

The interior of the temple is disappointing. The floor is unswept, and the walls show where the dust has gathered in crevices and on the uneven surfaces, as though it were no one's business to have it swept. The place where the idol is enshrined is perhaps the most dusty and uncared for in the whole building. The yellow cloth that is thrown over its head is stained and frowsy-looking, so that we feel that we would like to take it and the god and give them both a good washing. Everything has a cheap and third-rate look about it. There is nothing to excite reverence or make one feel that this is a sacred place, that one ought to take off one's hat and stand hushed and in awe because of the presence of the supernatural.

The very reverse is the case. The atmosphere of the place is such as to induce every one to walk about and examine it as one would a very inferior curiosity shop, and make jokes and behave as though one were on a picnic and bound to be as jolly and facetious as possible. That the effect on the Chinese around is precisely this is evident from their conduct. They do not tread on tiptoe as though afraid to break the solemn silence by their footfall ; neither do they walk with bowed heads as though conscious of the overpowering presence of the god. They crack their peanuts and throw the shells on the floor. They even light their pipes and, with broad grins at some joke, puff the smoke out, unconscious that they are paying any disrespect to the " Goddess of Mercy " that looks down upon them with a benignant and placid air. They are as jovial and light-hearted as though coming to a feast. They talk and jest with each other ; laughter echoes round the building, and smiles cover faces at some funny saying that has touched their sense of the ludicrous.

The Chinese is a person who is utterly devoid of reverence, sentiment, or devotion in his religion. With him it is a matter either of fear or of business, but mainly of the latter. A house is plagued with sickness, which is put down, not to bad sanitation or other natural causes but to the presence of evil spirits. This leads to a visit to the nearest temple to get the idol to drive them away. A new business is going to be commenced, but before beginning it is deemed essential to get the support of the idols. If one idol says it will not succeed, another is appealed to for its opinion, and if it be favourable, it is at once accepted as the correct one. Should the venture turn out a failure, no reproach of any kind is uttered against the god whose prediction has been falsified. The man takes the blame upon himself. His character has not been pure, he says, or he was born under an evil star, or he was naturally unlucky and so was bound to fail in anything that he undertook.

Men never dream of thinking about their idols as we do about God. No affection is shown for them, neither are they credited with any tender or human feeling toward any one that supplicates their mercy. It is most amusing to watch the faces of the Chinese when you ask them if the idols love them. A look of amusement at once flashes into them. The eyes gleam, the face broadens into a wide grin, and soon hearty laughter is heard at this most humorous and side-splitting joke.

As we enter the main room where the chief idol sits enshrined, the priest in charge advances to meet us. We are startled by his looks, for he has very much the appearance of an extremely emaciated corpse that has been spending the night in dissipation, and has not yet rallied from the effects of it. He is tall and fragile-looking, and so thin that his Mongolian cheek-bones project in an exaggerated fashion from his face, which seems to have nothing left upon it but a kind of dried-up parchment, from which every particle of moisture has evaporated. His eyes are sunken, and though they must have been good at one time, the sparkle that he tries to put into them when he speaks to us is a feeble, clouded one and only reveals to us that he is a confirmed opium-smoker. The whole look of the man is a ghastly one, and were he deprived of his priest's frock, and put on the roadside in the street below, he would hardly bear comparison with some of the most wretched outcasts found there amongst the beggar fraternity.

To-day, it seems, is a special one with the Chinese, for it is the first day of the new moon, and as there is a belief that the idols are more propitious on this day, as well as on the day of the full moon, large numbers have come up from the crowded, ill-smelling streets to present their petitions to them. It is on occasions like this that the priest reaps his harvest and gathers in sufficient money during these two days of the month by the sale of incense sticks and paper money to keep him in idleness for the rest of the month.

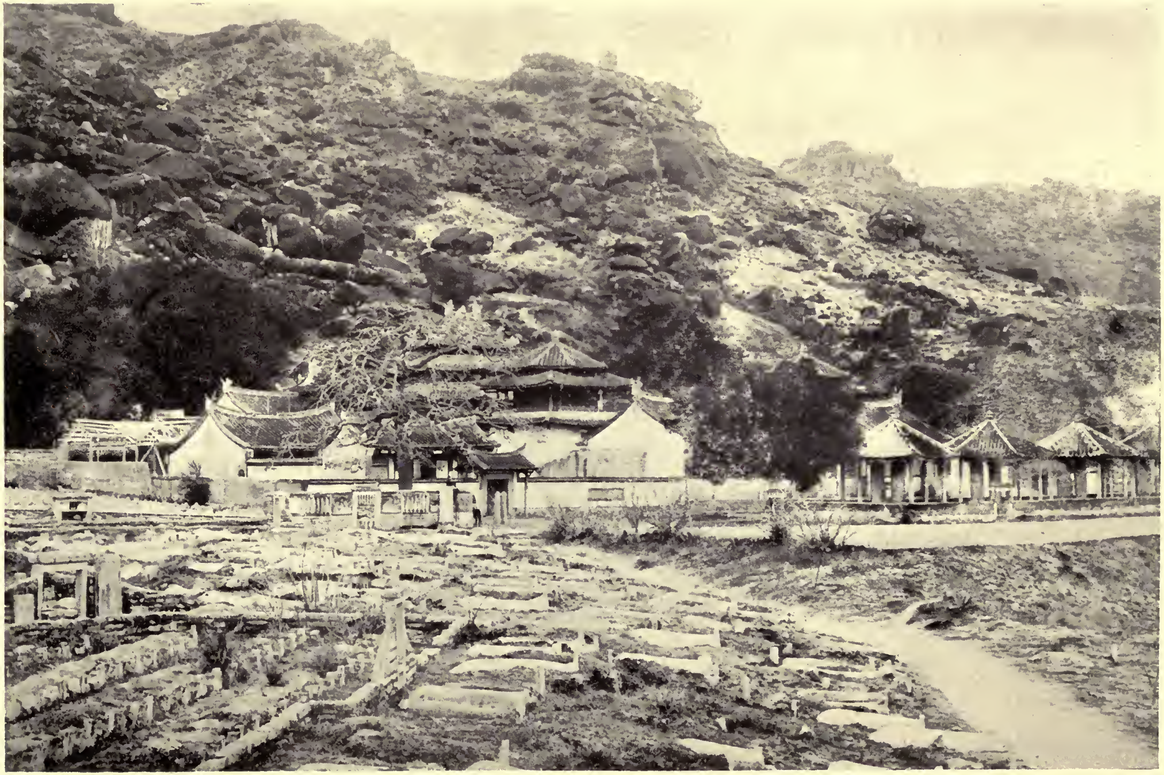
But let us sit down on this stone seat under the great banyan-tree that stretches its huge boughs to shelter us from the sun's rays, and let us watch the people as they come. Here is an old lady between fifty and sixty. Her feet have been bound so small that it is a wonder how she has managed to mount the broken, uneven steps up the hillside. She could not possibly have done so had not her sturdy grandson, who has come with her, helped her up. Her face is a good one and has the mother element strongly impressed upon it. It shows, too, that she has an active mind, and one imbued with a considerable amount of common sense. We are struck, however, with its paleness and the weary look which lurks beneath the pleasant smile that lies as a background behind the loving flash of her coal-black eyes, as they rest with affection upon the bright, cheery-faced lad by her side. Stopping only for a moment to take her breath after the steep climb, she buys a bundle of incense sticks from the priest and goes straight into the presence of the goddess. Here she stands as motionless as a statue, with her hands clasped high above her head, in a supplicating attitude, and her eyes fixed upon the placid, benevolent face of the image before her.

In a low voice she tells how of late she has been troubled with failing health. She cannot sleep at nights, her appetite is gone, and though she has called in many doctors she is getting worse and worse. Will not the goddess exercise her great power and give her back the strength she has lost? It is pathetic to mark the rapt devotion of the old lady as she pours forth her entreaties to the silent dust-covered figure before her, never dreaming of any immediate response, but willing to wait the will of the idol.

As she retired, her place was at once occupied by another, and so a continuous stream of worshippers succeeded each other with their petitions. This one wanted health, another came to pray for success in business, whilst yet another came to appeal for help to prevent a man from forcibly taking possession of his ancestral acres. One young man, who interested me greatly by his fresh, ingenuous-looking face, told me that he had just asked the idol if it could not get a situation for him. He had been for some months out of employment, and had gone to a number of temples to supplicate the gods in them, but they had all given unsatisfactory answers, and so he had come here to see what the goddess would do for him.

Considerable numbers of people were visiting the temple as a matter of pleasure, and without any reference to the idols. It was a rare treat for most of them to get away from the narrow streets, with their unsavoury odours, hot, stifling air and commonplace, poverty stricken looking houses that everywhere obtrude themselves upon the eye of the passer-by. Sauntering along in the wake of some of these, we suddenly emerged into a huge grotto, formed by the junction of six titanic boulders. The air was cool and delicious, so we sat down on one of the stone benches that had been placed for the use of visitors, and admired the cunning way in which some great catastrophe in ancient times had so nicely and so mathematically balanced these gaunt stones. The most skilled engineer that ever lived could not have so disposed of them to be a permanent record of his genius, for though hundreds of years have passed by, and countless rainy seasons have poured down their torrents upon them, and mighty typhoons with the hoarse roar of ten thousand giants in their voice have tried to hurl them from their place, they have all failed, and to-day they are as strong as though the silent workmen of the past had put them in position only yesterday.

We enjoy the cool, fresh air of this wonderful grotto, and watch the people from the hot, sultry streets luxuriating in this sunless cave. With a sigh of relief they throw down their fans on the stone tables, and are soon busy chattering with each other over the fragrant cups of tea that an attendant has brought in. The Chinese is an ideal man for enjoying a picnic. There is no rushing about, neither does he go wild with excitement and so exhaust himself. He takes things calmly, sips his tea and lets the aroma of every mouthful wander in a leisurely manner around his palate. He smiles, chats, makes his jokes, and dallies over the sweetmeats and the cakes, but gives no thought to the passing of time, beyond an occasional glance at the sun to see how the day is going. By and by, with a sigh, he will say, " Now let us go." The time is up and



LAM-PAW-TO TEMPLE, WITH SOLDIERS' GRAVES.

he knows it, and with a philosophic air he will resume his fan, and his hot, stifling life in the dusty streets, as though he had never known the pure and breezy air of the monastery.

Leaving this delightful grotto, we proceeded up a narrow stone staircase, when we suddenly found ourselves in a scene most unexpected and at the same time one that gave us a vast amount of enjoyment. It was a large and spacious room, partly roofed and partly opened to the heavens, and benches and tables were liberally distributed throughout it for the use of visitors. It was in reality a subsidiary temple of the god of war, who sat with a solemn face in his shrine. The ghastly, skeleton-looking priest evidently saw no reason why religious devotion and business should not be successfully combined. He accordingly fitted up the place in such a way as to attract prospective pleasure-seekers. That he had succeeded was evident from numerous testimonials scribbled on the whitewashed walls by members of convivial parties that had occupied the room. One of these with more force than good grammar declared that "this is a place to take a joy." To-day the room was engaged by a party of English people who had come to enjoy themselves for the afternoon. There were about a dozen of them, and amongst them were several young girls who were brimming over with fun and excitement, and who had evidently made up their minds to make the most of every moment at their disposal.

The tables and chairs had been moved to one side, and some of our English games were being played, much to the amusement of the groups of Chinese who gazed with wonder and astonishment at the antics of the merry party. "Puss-in-the-corner," "Tom Tiddler's ground," "Base," and "Kiss-in-the-ring," were successively played, and the place rang again with shouts of laughter, as one after another was caught and prisoners were made and released again. Even the Chinese became excited as the fortunes of the game varied, and I saw the eyes of staid, sober men who had never run since they were boys, sparkling with excitement. They seemed to be longing for an invitation to join in the romp; and even the opium-visaged priest with cadaverous-looking face was moved by the scene before him, and his dull eyes glistened and his limbs quivered as though at the slightest provocation he would have rushed into the whirling throng that were racing after each other and filling the neighbouring rocks with the echoes of their merry voices.

The only calm and sedate being in the whole scene was the stern-looking god of war, who seemed to look on with wonder, not unmixed with pleasure, at the antics and peals of laughter and smiling faces of the party before him. It required no very strong flight of imagination to believe that now and again he indulged in a wink, when no one was looking at him, and that nothing but a stern resolve to preserve his dignity in the presence of his worshippers kept him from stepping down and joining in the merry revels. At length the sun began to disappear beyond the lofty peaks of the mountains in the west, and long, trailing shadows flung themselves across the plain and up the sides of the hills. The visitors with one consent made preparations to return to their homes. The priest with the ghastly face, and eyes peering out of their deep sockets, kept close to the departing crowd to collect his fees for the use of the room, and for the supply of boiling water for the tea-making. People shrank from him instinctively, as a man that no honest person might keep company with, and the money that was paid him was dropped into his crow-like fingers as though the touch of his hand would contaminate theirs.

As we bade farewell to the place, we did so with regret. The day itself, as far as our outing had been concerned, had been an ideal one, and everything had combined to make it so. The temple was a perfect one for a picnic, for no choicer nor more beautiful place could have been selected for it. Rocks were tossed about in the most artless and fantastic shapes, while huge pine-trees growing out of their clefts gave a wildness and picturesqueness to the building that was nestled in their midst. The panorama in front was as charming as Nature in her most artistic mood could have devised. The great mountains in the distance were bathed in floods of sunshine. The river that wound its way across the plain looked like a silver thread that some fairy had dropped in passing, whilst the fields, clad in the emerald green of the growing rice, and dotted with countless trees, seemed like an immense park that had been laid out by an army of cunning workmen.

The one disappointing thing was the interior of the temple. Everything there was so tawdry and mean-looking. The wooden gods were dressed in cheap yellow-coloured cottons, stained and disfigured by years of dust that had lain undisturbed upon them. The floors were unswept and unwashed, showing that a woman's hand was needed, and soap and water to take away the grimy look that had eaten into everything. The priest and his attendant were dissipated-looking, and seemed as if they had been picked up out of the gutters of the town that stretched away at our feet.

One could not but feel that religion had fallen upon evil times when it had come to be administered by such men as these, and yet this temple was but a sample of countless others that are scattered throughout the length and breadth of this vast empire. The enthusiasm for religion has vanished. How could it be otherwise since opium-smoking, gambling, and dissipated priests are its teachers and representatives ! The nation is waiting patiently, pathetically, for the coming of Him who is the Saviour of the world.

CHAPTER XII

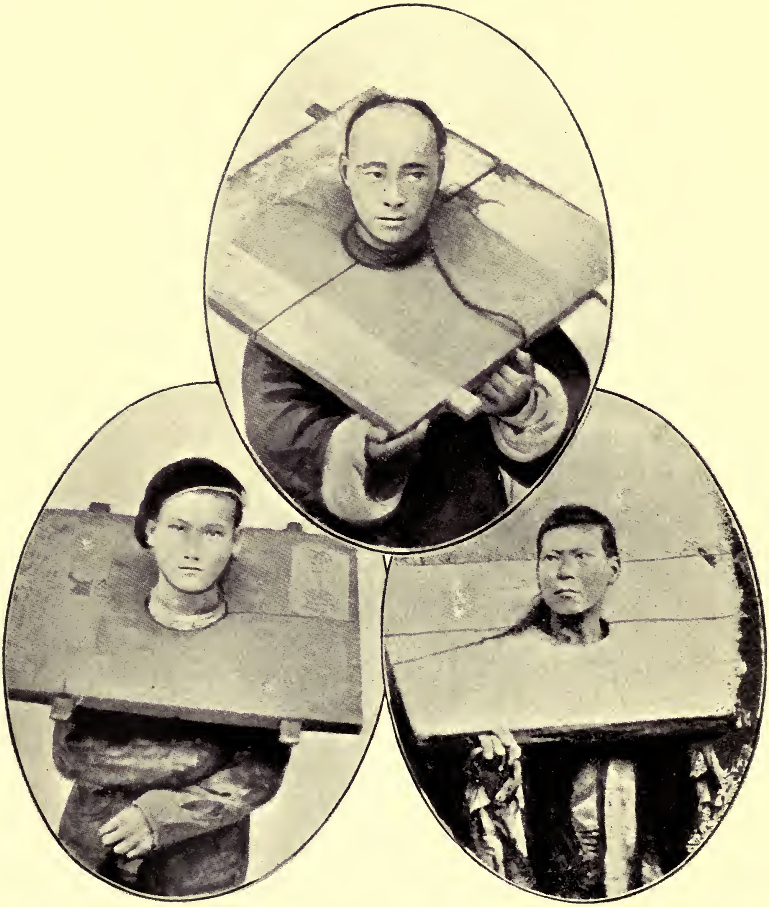
PUNISHMENTS

THE Chinese is a person full of surprises. He is like the kaleidoscope, for you feel that whatever strange and unexpected views he may have given of himself you have not yet got the last and final one that will exhaust his character. In his ordinary and every-day life, for example, he gives you the impression of being good-natured, easy-going, and kindly in disposition.

In many respects he is the counterpart of the typical Englishman. He is endowed with broad common-sense ; he is breezy and jolly, and is absolutely crammed full of conceit about himself and his country. He thinks there is no one to be compared with a Chinese, and that the Flowery Kingdom is the only land worth living in !

He has a keen sense, moreover, of justice, and a lofty ideal of human conduct. When, however, he begins to legislate for the criminal, and to carry out his own laws, he is no longer like his prototype the Englishman. His good-nature vanishes in a flash, and he reveals himself as a man who can be as cruel and bloodthirsty as any wild beast that ever tore its victim to pieces to satisfy its savage appetite.

In my account of the punishments inflicted upon the Chinese, I shall not reckon the beatings with bamboos, that form an essential of any ordinary trial, as among their number. There is no doubt that these flagellations are not mere child's play, and that they lacerate and tear away the flesh of poor victims, so that sometimes for long months they are confirmed invalids. Still, these playful exhibitions on the part of the mandarins cannot under the present system be done away with, for they take the place of cross-examinations,



CRIMINALS WEARING THE CANQUE.

To face p. 155.

pleadings of counsel, and learned disquisitions by the judge, none of which are to be found in a Chinese trial. The Chinese consider that these bambooings greatly facilitate matters and by a rapid and easy method secure that justice is done, by stimulating, if not the memory, at least the inventive faculties of the accused ; at any rate, they dissipate the monotony that very often makes a case so wearisome in an English court. To deprive a judge of this Magna Charta of the bench would be to rob most of the trials of that comical element that does so much to relieve the tedium of the law cases throughout the country. Without them, one would look in vain for the farcical developments that often convulse the sides of the spectators, and cover their yellow faces with broad grins and laughter.

A very common punishment for theft or housebreaking is the wearing of the *cangue*, or wooden collar. This consists of a rough board about three feet in width and four in length, with a liberal hole in the centre to allow of the free play of the criminal's neck. It can be divided in the middle to allow it to imprison the criminal's neck, the two parts then fit together and are locked by a padlock. A chain depends from it, which is attached either to his ankle, his wrist, or his neck. With the minute attention to detail of the Chinese the gravity of his crime can be measured somewhat by the particular part of the body to which this chain is affixed. When it is round the neck the housebreaking must have been of a specially daring character, whilst if it is fastened to his ankle it has been of a less bloodcurdling type, and so worthy of less severe treatment.

The criminal, after he has been condemned, is placed under the charge of the Tipao, or headman of the ward, who is responsible for him, and who marches him each morning from his prison to some thoroughfare near the place where the offence was committed. The unfortunate man is compelled to spend the day in the open air, in order that the outraged feelings of the community may be pacified, and that he may serve as a severe object-lesson to intending transgressors.

Though the cangue appears at first sight to be a very simple mode of punishment, a very considerable amount of torture can be caused by it. As the board is broad, the man can only just manage to bend his forearm over it. He cannot reach his face with his hands. This is particularly uncomfortable at mealtimes, for it is only by manœuvres worthy of a juggler or an acrobat, and by tilting up his board, that he can manage to get rice into his mouth. During the hot weather, when flies of all description abound, from the small, wiry kind that have such a fell purpose that nothing will divert them from it, to the huge, bloated, drum-beating kind, the cangue-bearer has no easy time of it. His face is absolutely without defence. If a fly settles on his nose, he has no resource but to call some benevolent person near by to wave it off, for a Chinese bluebottle knows when it is comfortable, and will not be frightened by a mere shake of the head. Should one of China's millions make him wish to scratch himself, he has again to scan the faces of the passers-by and select one that seems more kindly than the rest to perform this simple office for him.

All day long in sunshine or in storm he must remain within the limited area where his punishment has to be carried out, and when the shadows begin to fill the streets the Tipao appears, to lead him back to the prison where he is to spend the night. The darkness brings no alleviation of the man's sorrows ; rather, indeed, may they be said to begin after he passes the threshold of the place where he is to be confined. Chinese prisons are beau-ideal places of misery and wretchedness. No more loathsome nor ghastly holes, where human beings have to reside, can be conceived of. Imagine a room, say not more than ten feet square, with narrow stone slits in the wall that are to serve as windows, and that let in a dull and subdued light that leaves the place gloomy-looking on the sunniest day. The walls are black with dirt ; never have they been cleansed since the day when the plasterer gave his final touches to them. The floor is an earthen one, once beaten even but now covered with miniature hills and valleys, by long usage. Into this are crowded ten or a dozen prisoners. There is not an article of furniture in it. Bundles of straw, provided by the miserable inmates, are the only beds they lie on, and these become so foul and densely populated that the denizens of them, if they were only unanimous, could walk off with the unfortunate prisoners.

The wretched man has now to consider what position he shall take on the floor to secure the greatest amount of sleep. The board must be humoured and coaxed. If it is tilted up at a wrong angle, it may avenge itself during the night by collapsing and nearly choking him. He must poise it so that the sharp, uneven edges may prick as little as possible into the soft skin of his neck. Do the best he can, he must have nightmares, and restless dreams, from which he will start into troubled wakefulness, and he will greet the morning light with thankfulness because it will rescue him from the misery of his prison.

In cases where the crimes demand a severer form of punishment than the cangue or imprisonment, the law decrees that criminals shall be transported. The Chinese have adopted a very ingenious and inexpensive method of dealing with such offenders. China has no penal settlements, neither does she build huge prisons where the transgressors against the law are herded at great expense to the community. She has a very effective way of punishing the guilty, and all this without prisons or gaolers or staffs of paid agents, who would be a constant burden upon the Government.

A case with which I was acquainted will illustrate my meaning. An officer in a regiment stationed in Peking committed the crime of murder, and was condemned to be transported for life to a district fifteen hundred miles from where the offence had been perpetrated. One mandarin after another passed him across their jurisdictions, until he was finally handed over to the chief magistrate of the Prefecture[1] where he was to spend the rest of his life. In a few days he was released, with orders to report himself at the police office once a month. He was now at liberty to go where he liked, within a certain considerable area, and to adopt any profession he chose to earn his living. He was left absolutely uncontrolled, and he could have escaped to some other part of the country, or he could have taken steamer and gone abroad, and thus regained his liberty, but he did not dare to do so. It was the thought of his friends that prevented him. Visions of his home and of the loved ones there rose before his imagination, and stayed his feet from flying. Never had those dear ones seemed to have such a fascination for him as now when he had lost them. His wife and children, and the scenes amidst which he had grown up, became dearer to him as he looked at them through the dreary distance that lay between. He knew that, if he escaped, the authorities in the north would be at once informed, and they would proceed to inflict punishment on his relatives, on the recognised principle that the misdeeds of one member of a family compromise all the rest.

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[1] China is roughly divided into counties, prefectures, and provinces. A prefecture contains a number of counties, whilst a province embraces a large number of prefectures.

It was my fortune to become intimately acquainted with him, and as he was teaching me Northern Chinese, and lived in the same premises as myself, I had opportunities of closely observing him. He was a fine, gentlemanly-looking person, of the breezy type, and with smiles that seemed ever to be on the look-out to overspread and wreathe his face in sunshine. His manners showed that he had come from a good family, for he had none of those vulgar habits that too often distinguish the common people, and for a long time I never dreamed that I was dealing with a murderer. Many months passed by and his conduct was everything that could be desired, but gradually signs of the special weakness that had caused the tragedy in his life appeared. He would occasionally get drunk, and then the mad passion that had been lying dormant within him like a sleeping panther would burst out, and for the time being he became a raving demoniac. Chairs would be broken, crockery smashed, and furious onslaughts made on everything inanimate that he could lay his hands on. He was careful, in the midst of all his frenzy, to abstain from touching any person. That was the one sane point about him. People standing by looked on with amazement at this mad revelry, and kept muttering their astonishment at such wanton destruction of property. After a time the madness would slowly die away and he would lie down exhausted amid the ruins he had created and fall asleep. When he woke up he did so with the smile of an infant just awaking from its slumbers, and with a look of wonder in his eyes as he surveyed the scene around. He uttered no word of surprise, but began quietly to put his room in order with the wrecks of the things that lay strewn about.

The Chinese method of transportation is about as cheap and effective a system as the wit of man could have devised. It costs the Government nothing and it entails no permanent expense to it, for the men who are doomed to this punishment have to support themselves. It might seem that the freedom given to the criminal, when he has reached the place where he has to expiate his crime, would rob it of all its terrors, but this is not so. The sting of transportation, and the one thing that fills it with horror to the ordinary Chinese, is the fact that it means exile from his home. The love of home is deeply inbred in the heart of every Chinese. It is deep; it is as profound as his own nature. The finest affections of this mysterious people centre round their homes. Love of country pales and vanishes before this, for no matter how poor or wretched their homes may be, to be banished from them is to take away the very springs of life and to rob it of all its sunshine.

There are two factors in the punishment that make it a most serious and yet an absolutely safe one. These are this innate love for home, and the despotic power of the Government to seize any member of the criminal's family and hold them responsible should he escape. Very few men will run when they know that their father or mother, or uncles and aunts, or first cousins or second cousins may be pounced upon and held in durance vile until either they are released, are dead, or have surrendered themselves. Love for the dear ones at home keeps the man perpetually in his prescribed district, and though his heart may be breaking and his limbs trembling with excitement to hurry homeward, he feels himself bound to his place of exile by loyalty and devotion to those who would have to suffer for him.

There are certain offences that appear to us comparatively trivial, and yet the Chinese have adjudged them a most severe and cruel punishment. One of these latter is called "carrying the crate." One day I was informed that a man who had been found guilty of rifling a grave was suffering this particular penalty close by the very spot where he had committed his offence. I at once hurried along one of the main roads towards the place where the man was being punished, with a kind of shivery feeling that I should see something very horrible, and I was not disappointed. On a little plain at the foot of a low hill covered with graves, and within a few feet of a crowded thoroughfare, the terrible spectacle I had come to see was being exhibited to an immense crowd. The criminal was standing on his tiptoes on a number of bricks piled up inside a crate such as is used by us for carrying sheep. His hands were firmly tied behind his back, whilst his head protruded through the crate, his shoulders being well up against the cross-bars. The day was scorching hot, and the sun, like a molten furnace, was pouring down scorching rays from a cloudless sky upon the bare shaven heads of the crowd that had gathered to gaze in almost silent wonder at the gruesome sight.

The prisoner was in a most pitiable condition. A cloud of flies hovered about his head, like vultures over their prey, and a cluster of them had settled on his upper lip and actually eaten away a bit of the flesh. What with the sun glaring down upon his uncovered head and the agony caused by the flies the sufferings of the man must have been most acute. One could never have discovered that, however, from his face. It was as calm and unmoved as though no terrible emotion was tearing his heart to pieces. His eyes were wide open, but they looked straight before him to the distant mountains on which the afternoon shadows were playing, and he seemed plunged in some profound thought that absorbed all his attention. It was a pitiful sight to watch how the man clung to life. He knew that his fate was certain and that he would never leave the crate alive. The flies buzzed and hummed and turned his flesh black as with poisoned fangs they ate into it. He had but to let his feet drop or kick away one of the bricks and strangulation would have finished his tortures in a few seconds. But no, sacred life is the dearest thing in all the world, and he held on to it as though he had an endless lease of it.

Another terrible form of punishment, less frequent now than it used to be, is crucifixion. That it is not a modern one is evident from the fact that there is a distinct word for it in the language, and not a compound one that would suggest that it was of foreign origin. I once had an opportunity of witnessing an execution of this kind. The scene was one that impressed me profoundly, mainly because of the sacred associations connected with a death on the cross. The man was crucified under a large banyan-tree that grew on the edge of a road, where a constant stream of people passed and repassed the livelong day. Hundreds of people, anxious to see how a man would die in such circumstances, flocked to the place where he was to suffer.

As I stood in front of the man my ideas about a crucifixion, which had been formed by popular pictures on the subject, received a rude shock. It was so different from the conceptions that we usually have about it. The cross consisted of a heavy upright beam, fixed in a transverse one, resting on the ground. From this latter projected, in a slightly opposite direction, two short planks on which the man stood and to which his feet were nailed. Above was a cross beam, about the height of the man's shoulders, and at the extremities of this the palms of his hands were pierced by stout nails. In order to sustain the body and prevent it from sinking under the pain and agony it was enduring, the arms were securely roped to the cross beam, whilst the queue was wound round the top of the upright post so as to keep his head from drooping. Without these precautions the weight of the sinking body would have torn his hands from the nails, and he would have fallen forward on the ground. On his breast, written in a bold hand, was the statement that the criminal was a robber of so determined and ferocious a character that there was no method of punishment that could be found severe enough to meet his case. The authorities, therefore, had selected crucifixion as the most suitable by which to make him expiate his crime.

Standing close up to him and looking him straight in the face, I saw nothing about him to indicate that he was such a desperate character as the official description made him out to be. He was dressed in the ordinary loose blue calico clothes, such as the poorest of the working men wear. He seemed very much like the coolies that one sees everywhere, and if I had met him in the street I should not have thought there was anything particular about him to distinguish him from any one else. I was much struck by the stoical way in which the man was bearing his punishment. The muscles of his face did indeed show that he was in an agony of pain, but he was determined to die in silence and that no craven look or word should betray how deeply he was suffering. Two soldiers stood by the cross with long spears in their hands. There was no need of any larger force, for the crowds that thronged around showed plainly that they thought that the criminal was only getting his due. I scanned the faces of the people near by to see if there was any one who appeared moved by the spectacle before us, but I could not discover one. It seemed, indeed, as though the masses had gathered that day for some festal purpose. They were in their happiest mood. Faces beamed with smiles, and jokes were cracked, and congratulations passed from one to the other that the man had been caught.

Another punishment, even more severe than the above, is called "standing in the tub." This consists of a huge vatlike tub, with a hole in the lid, through which the culprit's head is protruded. At the bottom of the vat is a thick layer of unslacked lime and seven bricks piled up on each other. As the man's hands are tied behind his back he can do absolutely nothing to ease himself in any way. The agony of standing in one position all day long with unsympathetic onlookers gazing at him must be very great, and to have it continued through the lonely night, with the silent stars as his only companions, must render it absolutely intolerable. But this is only the beginning of his tortures. The next day one of the bricks is removed from under his feet, thus bringing him one day nearer his doom. A very small quantity of water is at the same time poured into the lime, which begins to work and to send up its noxious fumes to his face. This is repeated each day till the last tile has been taken away and his feet are now amongst the quicklime that burns the flesh more savagely and with a fiercer pain than ordinary fire would do. A very brief period after the last brick has been removed the tragedy is at an end. What with strangulation by the neck and the terrible burning of the lower parts of his body the man dies in the most excruciating agonies.

The common punishment of decapitation, though lasting but for a minute or two, is considered more severe than any of those above described, simply because the person loses his head. This, to the Chinese, is the greatest disaster that could ever possibly happen to him. Better a thousand deaths, each more cruel than the other, if he can only retain a perfect body to the end. This is a matter of superstition. He believes that after death he goes into the "Land of Shadows," where life is continued very much as it is in this world. To be deprived of his head is to make him a headless ghost and doom him to perpetual sorrow. His hands might grasp the chopsticks, but there would be no mouth to receive the food. He might wish to marry, but what woman would ever dream of taking a man without a head! She might have been willing to accept him, though he had been the ugliest specimen of mankind that ever lived; but a man without a head is so frightful an object that there is no woman but would shrink from him with horror. He would never be able to find his way anywhere, and the shades in that mysterious land would start with terror from him as he groped his way through the gloom. Give any criminal a choice between decapitation and the most cruel death and he would instantly choose the latter, no matter what tortures it might involve.

To my mind one of the severest forms of punishment is what is called the "lingering process," or slicing. It surpasses in fiendish cruelty the tortures that the Red Indians used to inflict upon their captives. It is intended, not simply that the criminal should suffer but that the utmost pain and agony that the human frame is capable of enduring shall be wrung out of him. Care is taken lest he die too soon, and so the vital parts are left untouched. Bits of flesh are sliced off here and there; a leg is cut off by the knee joint, then an arm is amputated at the elbow. After this an eye is gouged out, and so, for three days, the awful process of dismemberment goes on, till the man finally escapes his tortures by sheer exhaustion and loss of blood.

The Chinese judge, having nothing to control his decisions excepting his own free will, frequently settles cases after a very free and easy method. He sometimes shows great common-sense and ingenuity in the ruses adopted to elicit the truth in some disputed case. An amusing instance occurred some time ago, when the mandarin showed himself to be a man of humour and one well acquainted with the ins and outs of the Chinese mind. A Chinese went abroad and stayed away for fifteen years, where he accumulated quite a comfortable little sum, with which he determined to return home and spend the rest of his days in comfort. Night had fallen when he reached the entrance of the village where his home was. During all the years he had been away no letter had passed between him and his wife, and no tidings had ever reached him about her or his home. Was she alive? and, if so, would she receive him kindly after the neglect of years? His mind was so agitated about the reception he was likely to receive that he took the bar of gold into which he had converted his savings, and hid it in the ashes of the incense dish in front of the village idol in the public temple, and then with beating heart he made his way to his home. He found his wife alive, and to his delight she received him without any reproaches. She was too happy to have him back again to dream of scolding him. As they sat talking he told her how much money he had made and how it was then in the incense dish in front of the Goddess of Mercy in the village temple. He tried to tell her this in a low voice, but he did not succeed. A Chinese does not seem to know how to whisper. He can shout and bawl and howl, but the art of speaking quietly into another's ear is a lost one in China. The expression "in a pig's whisper" would be utterly misunderstood in this land.

At a crack in the wall that separated his house from his neighbour's was an ear that drank in every word that was uttered by husband and wife. It seemed glued to it. It was fascinated, indeed, by the strange stories that poured into it, and when the tale of the gold bar was related it thrilled with joy, for it seemed as though some fairy had come to reveal a hidden fortune. Next morning, before the dawn of day, the husband wound his way silently to the temple for his gold bar, but to his horror he found it was gone. He at once accused his neighbour of the theft, but the latter declared that he had not even heard of his return, and, therefore, he could not possibly have known anything about his gold. Finding it useless to discuss the matter, he hurried to the nearest mandarin and laid his complaint before him. This official happened to be a man of humour as well as a very sagacious one. He summoned the accused before him and ordered him to restore the gold. This the man declared he could not do for the simple reason that he had never taken it. The mandarin, who was convinced of his guilt, now determined to adopt a ruse which he believed would be successful. He ordered his policeman to go to the village temple and bring the idol in whose incense dish the gold had been concealed into his presence. When it arrived he asked the goddess who had stolen the gold. Profound silence was the only reply. "Don't you consider it your duty to tell me who the thief is, seeing that the money was practically entrusted to your care?" asked the mandarin. Still no reply. Upon this the judge became indignant and accused the idol of want of respect to him, and also of neglect in allowing a theft to take place in a temple that was her residence. The mandarin now adjourned the case for a day and in an angry tone threatened the goddess that if she did not confess then he would have her publicly beaten with rods by his policemen.

That same evening the mandarin summoned the accused into his private room, and with a look of mystery on his face and in a voice trembling with emotion he said: "The goddess has confessed that it was you who stole the gold. She is furious with you, for you have made her 'lose face' to-day when I threatened before my whole court to have her beaten, and she vows vengeance against you and your whole family. She says she will make your fields barren and send sickness into your home. Your sons will die, and when you leave the world there will be no one to worship at your tomb, and you will wander a hungry and wretched spirit in the land of shades. The only way in which you can avert the wrath of the goddess is by an instant confession. If you do this, I will use all my influence to get her to forgive you." The man was so terrified at the prospect of such awful calamities awaiting him that, trembling and full of awe, he made a clean breast of it and restored the bar of gold to the rightful owner ; and, though he was punished by the mandarin for his wrong, he considered he had got off lightly, since he had not to suffer the vengeance of the goddess.

In addition to the punishments described above there are a great many minor forms that are prescribed at the option of the mandarin, who has a large liberty allowed him by the State in his control of his own particular district and in his punishment of the unruly and disorderly. It is a remarkable feature of the Chinese law that it usually does not take cognisance of murder. Crimes of this kind are rarely brought before the notice of the authorities, as the rule is to settle them by a money compensation to the family of the murdered. This is so thoroughly understood that, even when the relatives of the murdered man appeal to the mandarin for redress, it is simply that he may help them to recover damages for the loss of their friend. There is no thought of the manslayer having to pay the penalty with his own life.

CHAPTER XIII

LYNCH LAW

CONSIDERING the absolute and despotic character of the Chinese Government, it is astonishing how much freedom the people have in matters that with us are settled exclusively by the police authorities. This is all the more extraordinary seeing that the Chinese is intensely conservative, almost as much so, indeed, as the Englishman, for, without any compulsion or suggestion from any one, he is prepared to hold on like grim death to what has been handed down to him by his fathers. To-day is commonplace and devoid of authority. Yesterday has already begun to put on airs, but two thousand years ago is invested with every power, human and divine, and what it says must be accepted without hesitation or dispute.

It is difficult, therefore, to account for the distinctly democratic tendencies that one finds in society at the present time ; they are not the birth of to-day. They are as old as the empire, and, therefore, one is led to assume that the men of those far-off times, who look down with wrinkled faces and hoary heads upon the men of to-day, whilst very decided that the sacred character of the past should be maintained, had a very deep strain of democracy in their hearts which led to profound sympathy with the masses. We know that the sages held very pronounced views as to the limitations of the kingly power, and we cannot avoid thinking that, had only some Chinese Simon de Montfort arisen in the early history of the nation, China, instead of being ruled by a despotic Government, would long ere this have had a Parliament of its own.

Lynch law in China is no modern institution, as it is with us. It has not to be carried out during midnight hours, by men with veiled and muffled faces, riding mysteriously and at racing speed to some lonely and secluded spot, and then separating as rapidly when the tragedy is over in order that their identity may remain a secret. Here it is an open and recognised power, and has not to do simply with horse-stealing, as was its main idea when it started in America.

Roughly speaking, it takes cognizance of all wrong-doing except offences against the State. These the Government demands shall be regulated by itself. In a multitude of cases, however, where the people would find it too expensive or tedious to go through the law-courts, lynch law, without any restriction from the officials, is prepared to step in, and with rough-and-ready justice to settle them.

One of the commonest offences it has to deal with is theft. This seems to arouse the very worst passions that lie smouldering in the heart of a Chinese. In a densely populated country like China, where large sections live on the very borderland of starvation, property is apt to be considered more sacred even than life, and the most terrible vengeance is often wreaked for theft of something that is comparatively of little value.

When a thief is caught in the very act, there is a fierce rush of the people near by and he is kicked and cuffed in the most unmerciful manner. A Chinese, however, will bear a vast amount of knocking about, without apparently any very serious injury being the result. He is like a sack of flour. You kick it and punch it and make deep dents in its sides till it doubles up like a drunken man and seems utterly demoralised. A shake-up, however, and it instantly assumes a normally healthy appearance. A thief, after a severe beating, goes howling and shrieking with agony, calling upon his father and mother to come at once to the rescue of their injured son ; but when he gets round the corner, or at a convenient distance from the mob, his cries slowly die away, and his face resumes its wonted look of childlike innocence and simplicity.

The punishment meted out to a thief varies with the mood of the people that make the capture. One day I was passing by a house in front of which was a crowd that seemed highly pleased with some entertainment that was giving them a great deal of amusement. It might have been a Punch and Judy show they were looking at, so jolly did they all appear. Smiles and laughter gave them quite a festive appearance. When I came close enough to see what was the reason of the fun, I found that it was caused by the sight of a thief who was suffering the penalty that King Mob was inflicting upon him for a theft in which he had been caught red-handed. The moment I caught sight of the poor wretch the laughter that had come infectiously upon me from the crowd vanished both from my face and from my heart, and a wave of pity swept over me. The man's hands had been tied very tightly behind his back with cords that must have cut into the flesh, and by these he had been hoisted up several feet from the ground and suspended from the branch of a tree.

The pain must have been most acute, for the arms were stretched out at right angles to his back, and the whole weight of his body had to be borne by his shoulder-joints. That he was a thief I did not for a moment doubt. He had the air of a vagabond about him. He was shabbily dressed in the monotonous blue cotton coat and trousers in which the masses like to array themselves. He evidently belonged to the criminal classes, for there was a nameless something that no language could define that hovered over his opium-hued visage and declared him to be a scamp. He was groaning with pain and beseeching the crowd by appeals to Heaven and earth to let him down ere his joints cracked and his arms were riven from his shoulders.

No sooner did he catch sight of me, than he at once turned all his arts of persuasion upon me, and begged me to intercede with the crowd to let him loose. My heart was too much in sympathy with him not to respond at once to his appeal, but I found it difficult to touch the feelings of those around me. "If we let him go," they said, "he will be back again in a few days and we shall lose more things. Better let him suffer now and then he will be afraid to venture back again." I eventually succeeded in getting the man set free, but it was a question with me afterwards whether I had really done right. There was one thought I had to face, viz., that

I had been the means of releasing an habitual thief, without his having suffered an adequate punishment for the wrong he had done. The man had been benefited but society had been mulcted of its rights. Still, I felt that I could not endure to see the agony of the poor fellow.

As has already been stated, the punishment for theft depends largely upon the mood and power of those who exercise lynch rule, and not at all upon the actual value of the things stolen. Where the offence, for example, has been committed against a wealthy man with a powerful clan at his back, the reprisal is often of the most savage character, and is altogether out of proportion to the injury done to his property.

An illustration from an actual fact in life will explain exactly what I mean. One day my duties led me to a hospital, where a large number of patients were collected from all parts of the country to consult the English doctor who was in charge of it. There were country bumpkins straight from their farms, in quiet villages in the interior, open-mouthed at the wonders of the city, and too shy almost to dare to speak. There were sailors from a neighbouring port, with a breezy air about them, as though they were in a north-east gale. There were coolies and shopkeepers and opium-smokers, and men with hideous ulcers on their legs, all drawn by a common purpose and sitting side by side on the benches, waiting the arrival of the doctor.

My attention, by and by, was drawn to a man seated on the ground, with a young lad standing by his side with the saddest-looking face it was possible for a boy to have. I at once went to him to see what was the matter. There seemed to be something wrong with the man's eyes, for they had a strange and inflamed look about them that at first puzzled me. As I looked more closely into them, I discovered to my horror that they had been torn out of his head.

"Who is this man?" I asked the boy.

"He is my father," he replied.

"How is it that he has lost his eyes?" I inquired.

"They were gouged out a few days ago by a rich neighbour," he answered. And he went on to explain that his father's buffalo, whilst grazing along a bank, had stretched out its huge rhinoceros-like mouth and snatched a few mouthfuls from the rice that was growing in the field close by. The news was instantly carried to the owner of the rice, who determined upon prompt and vigorous action.

And here let me digress for a moment to dwell upon a singular fact in Chinese life that no foreigner has ever been able to explain, and that is the rapidity with which news is carried about in this vast empire. One does not seem to be able to do anything that shall not be known quickly over a large area. You take a walk in a secluded place, and you fancy that you are quite alone, when half a dozen forms will suddenly appear and will silently but persistently follow you. You make a dash for a hillside, and you climb up by devious and unbeaten paths to a spot that you know to be far removed from any human habitation, and after a time you sit down, perfectly satisfied that you are absolutely out of the reach of the omnipresent vision of the Chinese.

As you are enjoying the delicious feeling that there is no eye scanning your every action, you happen to look round, and to your horror you see several yellow faces peering over some bushes at you, as solemn-looking and as sphinx-like as though they had grown there and had their permanent abode in that spot. By and by they will return to their village, and every man, woman, and child in it will, in a wonderfully brief space, know everything you have done during your walk.

But the most mysterious thing is how news is carried from vast distances without any apparent means of transit, with nearly absolute correctness. A thing happens, say, a thousand miles away. A telegram arrives giving the merest outline of it. You mention this to a Chinese as a startling bit of news, and he astonishes you by saying that he has already heard it. You ask him how, and he says, "Oh! a friend of mine told me." How the friend got to hear you cannot find out. It is quite true he may have received a telegram as well as you, but this is extremely improbable, as telegrams are very expensive in China, and only men in official positions, or in a large way of business, can indulge in the luxury of them.

But the mystery has by no means ended. Within a few days the news will have penetrated far beyond where the original telegram was received. People living in crowded cities, many miles away, will have heard of it. Farmers who have collected in market towns and fairs off the great trunk roads will discuss it. The dwellers in lonely hamlets that lie in the shadow of the hills will tell each other the startling story, and the air will be full of the echoes of voices that have been giving their version of the news that has caused such excitement.

Now how has this been accomplished? The Chinese have few, if any, newspapers to give the daily news, and no telegraph lines outside of beaten tracks, with which to flash information through the country, and yet high and low, rich and poor, have got it with a certainty and a rapidity as though a thousand telegraph offices had been busy night and day in spreading the news as fast as electricity could carry it. How all this is done is a mystery for which, as far as I know, there is absolutely no means of getting a solution.

To return to the blind farmer's story of wrong. An unseen eye, invisible to the farmer, had caught sight of the huge mouth of the buffalo as it surreptitiously cropped the succulent grain, and news of the theft was at once carried to the rich man. Mad with anger, he summoned a number of his clan, and without delay King Lynch, with passion in his heart that would easily ripen into murder, was on his way to avenge the wrong that had been committed.

The farmer, little dreaming of the tragedy that was about to be played in real life, was quietly watching his buffalo grazing, when the infuriated mob burst upon him and seized him. The sentence that had been decided upon as they hurried along, that he should have his eyes torn out, filled him with horror. He begged and prayed and entreated, but in vain. He offered a hundredfold compensation for the grain that had been eaten, nay, he would relinquish the buffalo that had done the wrong, if they would only leave him his eyesight. Every heart was steeled against the agonising cry of the man who was in the grip of a furious mob. It was not money that was wanted, but revenge, and in a few minutes the terrible deed was committed, and the man was left on the ground in pain and anguish, never more to see the light of day nor to gaze upon the faces of those he loved.

"What have you come to the hospital for?" I asked him.

"I have had my eyes torn out," he said, "and having heard of the fame of the English doctor, I have come to see if he would not put new ones in." By and by, when he was taken in to see the doctor, he told him his story, and in piteous tones besought him to give him new eyes. "I have heard of your reputation," he said, "and what miracles you have been able to work amongst your patients. Will you not use your great skill, and give me back my eyesight?" The doctor assured him that he would be only too glad to do so, but no human being possessed such a power. "Oh!" said the man, in a plaintive and pitiful tone, "it is not that you cannot, but because you are unwilling to do so," and he was led from the consulting-room bemoaning his sad lot, and complaining that the doctor refused to have pity upon him and supply him with a pair of new eyes.

A confirmed thief, who proves himself amenable to no law or discipline, will ultimately be condemned by Judge Lynch in the highest penalty a human being cay pay—and that is death. This sentence will be carried out in open day; no policeman will appear on the scene, and no movement of the executive will be made to interfere with it in any shape or manner whatsoever.

A recent case will illustrate what I mean. A farmer had a son who had grown up to be as bad a man as it was possible for heathen society to produce, and that means a great deal. He was an opium-smoker, a gambler, and a profligate. He was a master in the vices that qualify a man in China for any deed of wickedness. As his habits were expensive and he scorned the idea of work, he had to compel society to support him. A farmer's wife would wake up some morning and find her roost empty. At another house a buffalo would disappear, and not a trace could be found as to how the huge brute had vanished. A farmer would go in the early dawn to till his fields, and find that several rows of his finest "eagle" potatoes had been dug up during the night, and carried off. A patch of melons, too, just as they were turning a beautiful golden hue, had been cut from the vines and taken, no one knew where. The excitement through the country-side was intense, and vows were made that when they caught the thief, they would visit him with the direst vengeance. Everybody was perfectly certain who he was, but he was too clever to leave the slightest clue by which they could bring his thefts home to him. Without this no one would touch him, for the sense of justice is strong in the Chinese, and without positive evidence men would not dare to act. Even the mandarins, when they have the clearest proof of a man's guilt, will not execute him until he has signed a written document confessing his crime. If he does not do this willingly he is beaten to a jelly with hard bamboo rods, and is most fiendishly tortured to compel him; but until he puts his hand to the paper and signs his own doom, the hand of the executioner must be stayed.

Time, however, the great detective, ran him at last to earth. A wakeful farmer caught him in the very act of loosing his solitary cow to lead her away in the darkness. A committee of angry citizens met in wild, tumultuous disorder at dawn next morning. The thief had actually been caught at last. He was here, trussed and tied in so stern a fashion that no conjurer's art could ever loose him. His face had the look of a man that knew the doom that was awaiting him, but he was determined not to show the white feather.

The Chinese at his quietest is a loud-voiced man, and talks as though he were in a gale of wind; but to-day there was a perfect tempest, as the men remembered their wrongs and discussed their schemes of vengeance. Finally, they dragged the criminal to his father's farm, and told him that they had decided that he should act as the executioner of his son by burying him alive in one of his own fields.

The man shrank back with horror from the proposal, and with tears and entreaties begged and prayed the crowd to spare him from this horrible fate. But what were tears to them, or the breaking hearts and agonised prayers of a father and mother that tried to win the life of their wretched son? Vengeance was what they wanted, and vengeance they would have; so in loud and angry voices they told the father that unless he proceeded to carry out their decision at once they would set fire to his homestead and drive him and his family from the place, and even then they would see that his miserable son should suffer the penalty of death.

Terrified at what he knew to be no idle threat, he seized a hoe, and dug a hole right in front of the home where the son had lived as a lad. Then by the direction of the lynchers he tied a stone around his son's neck, and with loud cries of bitter sorrow that wrung his heart he pushed him in and shovelled the earth over him. When the tragedy was complete, and the crowd had stamped down the soil over the wretched man beneath, they excitedly separated to their homes, heedless of the sorrowing hearts they left behind them, but satisfied that an act of justice had been performed that would win the approval of every man in the entire region.

One of the gravest crimes that comes within the jurisdiction of Judge Lynch is murder, but the only penalty he ever exacts is a pecuniary one, and but very rarely a life for a life. This crime is not a capital offence in China, neither does the law deem it necessary that it should concern itself about it. China, indeed, seems to be one of the easiest places in the world where murder can be committed with complete immunity to the murderer, as far as his personal safety is concerned.

A man, for example, kills another. No policeman appears on the spot to investigate the case and to arrest the criminal, neither does any one dream of appealing to the mandarin to interfere in it. Something, however, very important does take place. A committee of the nearest friends of the dead man is appointed to take charge of the case and to wring as much blood-money out of the murderer or his family as loud-voiced arguments, appeals to Heaven, and screams of the despairing widow will enable them to extract. The murdered man may have been a very insignificant member of society, but now that he is dead he is no longer so. He has at once become a mightier force than ever he could have been when he was alive. A murdered Chinese is any day worth a score of living ones, and any man of ordinary ambition ought to jump at the idea of being killed, seeing the immense importance he at once assumes in the family and the high financial value at which he is appraised.

It is exceedingly amusing to watch how Judge Lynch acts in a case like this. He is no longer the stern, inflexible avenger of justice, whose heart is impervious to every baser motive and who demands only that the interests of truth shall be subserved. His eyes have been blinded by the shadow of gold that has fallen upon them, and now even the dead man is lost sight of, and the sacredness of human life vanishes in the thought of how much more valuable financially a corpse is than the living body. The one aim now is to extract as much money out of the murderer as possible, without regard to honour, justice, or truth.

The judge with his jury consist of the nearest relatives of the murdered man, the nearer the better—a wife, if possible, as she will be a very effective and picturesque figure in the discussion of the case. If there be also an aged father, it will be an additional advantage, for he can plead most pathetically from a standpoint that never fails to appeal to the Chinese. They proceed in a body to the home of the murderer, who, expectant of their arrival, has gathered his most powerful relatives around him, for whatever the decision may be, they will have to share with him the responsibility.

In a case of this kind no time is lost in superfluous courtesies. The matter is stated curtly and forcibly, and a certain sum for compensation, far beyond what they expect to get, is demanded. No smile must cross the face, for that would show weakness. A stern look, contracted brows, and passion in the voice are more effective, for the aim at this point is to strike terror into the hearts of the other side.

To produce a suitable impression, the father of the murdered man, in trembling accents and with a voice filled with emotion, speaks of his son who has been ruthlessly torn from him by the hand of the assassin. He describes how good he was and how he depended upon him to be the solace and support of his declining years. He hoped, moreover, that, after his death, he would bring the offerings to his tomb that would reach him in the other world and make his existence there a happy one. Now his spirit will have to wander hopelessly and aimlessly about, a hungry, wretched ghost, since the son who could have put gladness into his life is himself a wanderer in the land of shades. This speech, given with a dramatic power of which the Chinese are masters, is producing too great an effect, so one of the opposition interrupts him and declares that the man was killed only because he was the aggressor, and that it was by the merest good luck that his opponent had not succumbed before the ferocity of his attack.

Upon hearing this, the widow, who has been sitting by, with eyes inflamed and tears streaming down her face, jumps up and with a shriek denounces any one who would say a word against her dead husband. She is a striking figure and acts her part with consummate ability. Her long black hair hangs dishevelled down her back, her eyes flash fire, and her small, delicately-shaped hands move about in a whirlwind of eloquence as she describes her desolate condition. There is a perfect fascination about her, as with passion in her voice and the look of a fury in her mien she declaims against the dastardly act that has bereft her of her husband, and made her children fatherless. What a splendid orator she would have made, this frail, feeble-looking woman, as with unconscious eloquence she passes with the rapidity of lightning from point to point, her voice rising and falling in harmony with the passion of the moment.

But she has rivals of her own sex, who have been burning with impatience to join battle with her. One by one these gradually take the floor, without, however, for one moment staying the flow of her eloquence. In a moment the room becomes a perfect bedlam, and one can only see excited faces and waving hands, and catch now and again the close of a sentence that has been screamed out louder than the rest. After hours of this, tired out by incessant talk and by arguments repeated over and over again, the combatants come to terms, and a certain sum having been offered and accepted, Judge Lynch declares the case settled, and this decision is held to be final as though pronounced by a mandarin in open court.

The system of lynch law is more effective in China than hanging is with us. When a man knows that he will have to pay high pecuniary damages, that will have to be disbursed either by himself or his nearest of kin, should he take away a man's life, it puts a restraint upon him even in his moments of wildest passion, and stays his hand from murder.

CHAPTER XIV.

DOCTORS AND DOCTORING

THE medical profession is open to every one in China, whether it be man or woman, without any of the limitations that in England strictly confine it to those who have studied for it. Here there are no university examinations, no hospitals, no study of medicine or of anatomy, and no troublesome certificates demanded. A long robe, a look of profound learning—such as one has met with in the homelands—a smattering of the names of certain herbs and concoctions, and the person is ready to treat the most intricate case that ever puzzled the brain of a first-rate physician in the West.

It is, perhaps, the ease with which every one may become a doctor that induces almost every Chinese to profess some knowledge of medicine. In fact, one is apt to be startled when he finds any one modest enough to say that he knows nothing of doctoring. A dirty, greasy-looking Chinese whose clothes have never been washed, and whom you would hardly touch with a pair of tongs, attracts your attention. He is a common labouring man, with no more intelligence than the ordinary run of that class. You are apt to treat him very cavalierly, as a man you do not wish to be bothered with, when some one whispers in your ear that he is very famous as an amateur doctor and has cured a great number of those whom he has treated.

I have rarely met with any one that could not, at a moment's notice, prescribe for diseases that require the highest skill in their treatment. A man, for example, is in the last stage of consumption. A rough-looking labourer, uncouth in manners and with a voice fit to break the drum of one's ear, happens to come in. He diagnoses the case as though he were a professional, and declares that certain herbs carefully concocted will infallibly cure the sufferer. No one expresses any contempt for his opinion. Others will join in the discussion, giving each their remedies, and every one is sure that if the case were in his hands the patient would certainly recover. Usually, when a man intends to take to doctoring as a profession, he studies the works of the famous men that lived in remote times, and whose reputation has come down to the present day as the founders of medical science in this country. Such books are numerous, and the fact that they are ancient is one of their chief recommendations. They believe that if they master these they will then be competent to deal with any of the diseases that those great men treated with such success. The Chinese have no faith in original discoveries in medicine. Men's bodies, they say, are the same as they were in ancient times. Men of gigantic minds and penetrating genius studied the ailments of mankind and left the result of their discoveries to posterity, and so, to-day, men calmly and comfortably accept the prescriptions given in those books with the most implicit faith and confidence.

Amongst the most famous of the medical works existing at the present day is one by the celebrated Emperor Shin Nung, who lived B.C. 2737. You try and convince a Chinese scholar that he is a mythical character and he will triumphantly knock you over by pointing to the treatise that bears his name. Shin Nung is to-day worshipped as the God of Medicine. In order to account for his wonderful knowledge it is said that he was originally a fairy who assumed the human form out of pity for poor humanity, which was suffering from diseases that men could not control. To help him in his errand of mercy he was born with a transparent stomach, by which he was enabled to test the action of a large number of herbs and to observe how certain foods were transformed during the process of digestion. The results of his observations were recorded in the treatise that men believe was written by him, and doctors use it to-day as the highest authority that exists on drugs.

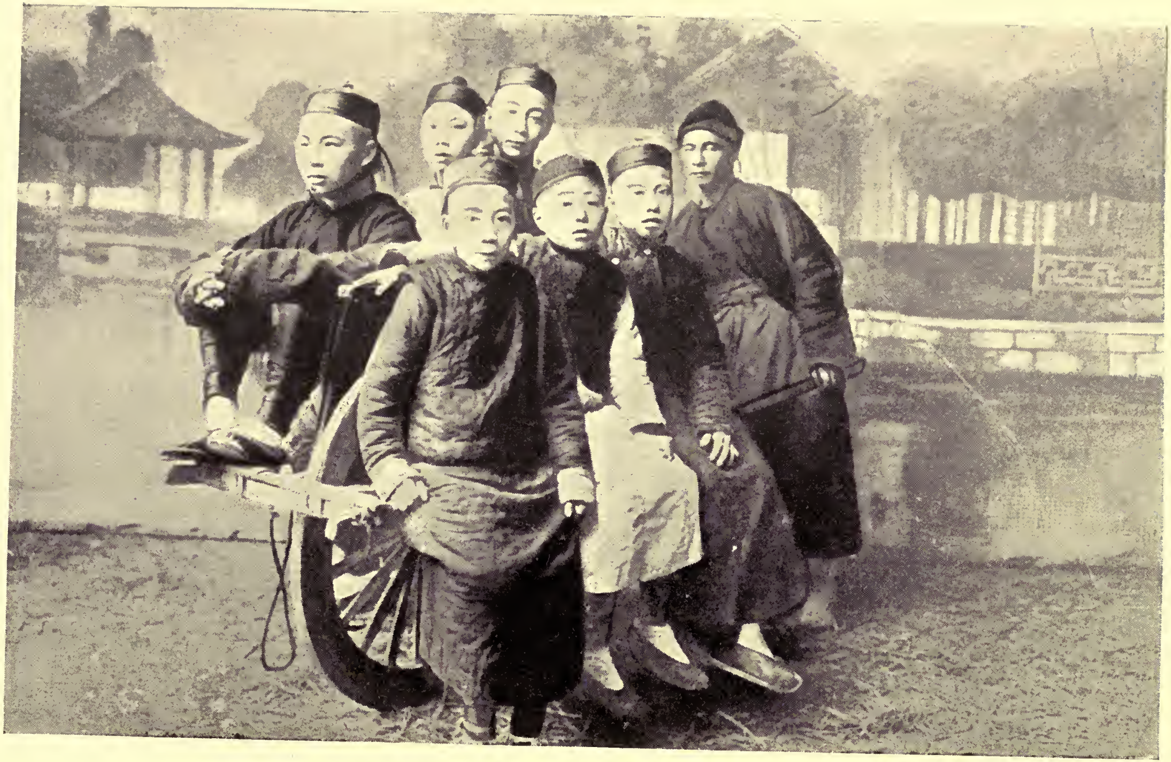
Coming down later to the period of Chinese history called the "Three Kingdoms" (A.D. 221-54), Hwa

T'o figures as one of the great names in the medical profession. He was evidently a bold and daring practitioner, for he believed in the use of the knife when it was requisite to save life. It is said that during the struggle for the kingdom by the three rival claimants for the throne, one of the heroes of the day was wounded in the arm by a poisoned arrow. Death would have ensued in a few hours had not Hwa T'o cut into the bone and, washing out the poison, saved the man's life. Another famous warrior, hearing of his success, sent for him to prescribe for a severe pain that he had in his head. After examining him for some time, Hwa T'o said, " Your disease requires prompt and heroic treatment. If you wish to recover, you must allow me to open your skull. I shall then be able to remove the disease that is injuring your brain, and you will be restored to perfect health." The patient was horrified at this proposal, and looking at him sternly, said, " It is evident that you wish to murder me, but I shall frustrate your plans by having you executed," and he was accordingly hurried off to prison, where in a few days he was beheaded. Whilst he was waiting to be put to death the gaoler was exceedingly kind to him and did everything in his power to mitigate the bitterness of his position. Hwa T'o, to compensate him for his goodness to him, presented him with a manuscript that contained all his famous prescriptions. " I have nothing else to give you," he said, " but if you carefully preserve this, it will be a source of wealth to you and to your children for many generations."

The gaoler hurried home with the precious document, and handing it to his wife, told her to put it away in the safest place she could find, for he assured her, with flashing eyes, that neither they nor their children need ever want with such a precious possession as this. After preserving it carefully for some time, she one day took it out, and tearing the leaves apart, began to burn them. Whilst she was doing this her husband entered and asked her what she was doing. " I am burning Hwa T'o's book," she said. " I have been thinking what a sad end was his and how all his knowledge was the cause of his death. Some of these days when you become famous through using his book, you, too, may end your life on the scaffold, and so I thought I had better destroy it, and so secure you from such a miserable destiny." The gaoler was only just in time to save a portion of the famous collection, and this has been treasured ever since. The directions it contains are carried out by the profession throughout the whole empire.

Gliding down the stream of time, we come to the Sung Dynasty (begun in A.D. 960). At this date there existed a doctor, of the name of Sun, whose fame has travelled down to the present day. He has long since been deified, and temples innumerable have been erected to his honour. One of his titles is "The Great God that Preserves Life." He had the reputation in his day of being able to cure almost any disease that was brought to him. On one occasion his skill was severely tested. The Queen fell ill, and none of the Court physicians could do her any good. Sun had already become famous and so the Emperor summoned him to the palace to see whether he could cure her or not. As it was impossible that he should be allowed into the presence of the Queen, it was arranged that a silken thread should be tied over her pulse, and that he should hold the end of it in the adjoining room and by that means diagnose the case. The Queen, who had not full faith in Sun, thought that she would test him before taking his medicines, so she fastened the thread to the bedpost. The moment he got hold of the string he cried out, "This is wood, it is not a human hand." Amazement was depicted upon every countenance, but the Queen determined to try him still further, so she tied it to the leg of a dog. Instantly he exclaimed that he was being played with, as the thread was in contact with a lower animal and not with the pulse of the Queen. All doubt now vanished from the royal mind, and Sun soon showed his great ability by curing a disease that had baffled all the celebrated physicians of the day.

Doctors are broadly divided into two classes, those who treat internal diseases and those that profess to be able to deal with external complaints. Occasionally the same man will undertake to prescribe for both. In order to have a chat with a Chinese doctor, and



RIDE ON A WHEELBARROW

at the same time watch his methods of treatment, I invited one to come and see my servant who had been suffering from ague. In a short time the Chinese Æsculapius appeared, dressed in a long white robe, and with a dignity of manner that is natural to the Chinese when he is doing the polite. He was a tall, spare man of about fifty. His face showed a certain refinement that seemed to indicate that he had made a serious study of his profession and that he was prepared to accept any responsibility that a difficult case might bring upon him. His smile was a pleasant one and would help to inspire confidence in any one he was treating.

His examination of the servant was systematic and thorough. He made him sit down right in front of him and with his first three fingers he felt the pulse of the left hand. The way he did this seemed to me most comical, for he kept moving them, just as though he were playing on the keys of a piano. After about three minutes of this musical practice, he did the same with his right hand. I asked him why he examined both pulses. " Are they not precisely the same in their actions? " I inquired. " No," he said, " they certainly are not. The reason why I felt both was because I wanted to find out the seat of the disease. The whole of the body," he continued, " is divided into twelve chambers. Six of these belong to the left and six to the right pulse. I have, therefore, to examine the two to find out the particular chambers that are affected."

" And what is the result of your examination so far? " I inquired.

" I find that the liver and gall-chambers are both affected by cold and this has resulted in fever. The patient needs medicines that will specially act on these."

After this we got into conversation about the gall, which plays a most important part in the estimation of the Chinese. " Some men," he said reflectively, " have very small ones, whilst others again have very large ones."

" Which do you think is the most serviceable for mankind in general? " I asked. " The small ones, most decidedly," he promptly replied. " Men with small galls are amiable, inoffensive people that are never a danger to society. Men with large galls, on the other hand, are daring, fierce, and bloodthirsty. For soldiers a large gall is indispensable. They need this to meet the foe heroically, to rush into the forefront of battle, and dare to face death in any shape." Politeness restrained me from hinting that the Chinese nation, as far as fighting was concerned, seemed to have been endowed by Nature with particularly small galls. He might not, indeed, have been offended if I had, for to tell a man that he has a small gall, that he is a coward, never raises a blush to his face nor passion in his heart, but he replies, " That is quite true, my gall is a very small one indeed."

I now asked him to explain to me his theory of the twelve chambers. " The body," he replied, bowing gracefully to me, " is divided into twelve compartments as it were. At fixed hours of the day the blood moves with precise regularity into one of these. For example, the heart being in the exact centre of the body, the blood flows into it at twelve o'clock. Any blow on it at that hour would be apt to prove fatal, for the vital forces are then gathered into it, and any violent disturbance of them might result in death. The same is very much the case with the other chambers," he continued, " but since they are farther removed from the seat of life, the result of any injury to them when the blood is collected in them is not likely to be so immediately serious as in that. Of course, I do not mean," he said, " that every drop of blood in the body really goes into any one particular chamber, and that the rest is left destitute of any. There is an active, controlling force in the blood that urges it to travel into the various chambers. To injure this, the vital power in the blood, is to endanger life at the very fountain."

This medical theory is firmly believed in by the public generally, and especially by professional boxers and pugilists. These latter, in their contests with each other, aim at those chambers that are believed to be then filled with a full tide of blood, for they believe that if they can only strike them they will inflict the most serious injury on their opponents. The Chinese are exceedingly superstitious on this point, and after they have been once struck by these trained boxers they will declare that they feel pains in the region where the blow fell years after the event. Men with pale faces, hacking coughs, and broken-down physiques will declare that they trace the beginning of bad health to some blow that a boxer gave them—it may be months, or even years, ago.

Two principal causes are assigned by the medical men of China for a very large proportion of the diseases that afflict the people of this empire, viz., heat and cold. As a result, medicines and even foods are divided into two great classes, cooling and heating. When a man is run down, and his blood moves sluggishly and life is a burden, the slowly ebbing vital forces must be whipped into action by foods and medicines that have an element of fire in them. If, on the other hand, he is feverish, and the pulse is quick and excited, cooling remedies must be applied.

To reduce a fever, a favourite remedy is uncooked pears. These have no resemblance, except in appearance, to our home fruit. They are nearly tasteless, and so hard that they almost require an axe to penetrate them. It is a most pathetic sight to see a man with flushed face and bloodshot eyes making feeble efforts to bite into these bits of rock in the hope of quenching his thirst and allaying his fever. You suggest that some milk would prove more palatable and at the same time more nourishing ; but you are reminded that milk is heating and that it would only add fuel to the fires that are already raging in the sick man. Many men in this country have been slowly starved to death owing to their determined belief that the very things that would have restored them to health would be the death of them if they ate them.

The Chinese have a profound faith in doctors, and a capacity for taking huge doses of medicine. In fact, they rather seem to enjoy themselves in being sick and in having to swallow concoctions sufficient to fell an ox with their strength. This well-known infirmity has given rise to a class of strolling quacks who travel about the country and profess to cure every disease that flesh is heir to. They are known by their dress, being a gown that comes down to their ankles, that at some period in the past was white, and by carrying a white flag on which is inscribed in flaring characters the fame they have acquired in the curing of disease. These men are clever scamps who have failed in every other profession and have taken up this itinerant doctoring as a last resource. They have a thoroughly Bohemian look about them, and yet there is something in their general appearance that makes one have a sneaking liking for them. But let me describe a typical one. Usually he has a broken-down, battered look that tells a story that one can read at a glance. His life has been evidently a stormy one, and he has not lived it with any great success. One can see from his clothes the desperate effort that he is making to keep up his respectability. They are worn and seedy-looking and threadbare, but the tenderest care is taken of them, for if they were allowed to sink much lower he would not be able to maintain the appearance that his profession demands. His shoes have a decidedly unhappy look, and seem as if at any moment they would give up the ghost and vanish. As the country people, however, largely go barefooted, or simply use straw sandals when they are making a journey, this fact has no significance in their eyes.

His face is sharp-featured and, on the whole, not an unpleasant one. It has the look rather of an adventurer than of a villain. One can see that behind it there is a lurking humour that flashes out continually at something grotesque in the human life upon which he is practising. His eye is bright and piercing, and seems to take in everything and to be always on the lookout for a possible patient, and to be able by some special instinct to pick him out from the crowd at a moment's glance. Long and varied experience enables him to read character and to know how it can be played upon with success. As you look upon him you feel that you have before you a man who knows the ins and outs of all the shadiest phases of Chinese life, and yet one who has sufficient humour in him not to have been utterly contaminated by the men and the scenes in which he has mixed.

Their peculiar ability is not displayed with so much advantage in the cities, where men's wits have sharpened, as in country places and especially at fairs. There they are in their element, for they have a splendid field upon which to exercise their talents, there being no more credulous people in the world in regard to their ailments than the Chinese. They select a prominent place where the crowd is the greatest, and display their stock-in-trade which is to work such miracles upon the farmers and country bumpkins that gather round, with wonder in their eyes, to gaze upon the strange medicines.

To the uninitiated they seem to be a very poor collection with which to carry out the healing art. Bundles of dried roots and grasses with the sap out of them, and serpents' flesh, black and disgusting-looking, and herbs that have a reputation in the Chinese pharmacopœia, are spread out without any attempt to make them attractive or alluring. There are also little pyramids of decayed and unwholesome-looking teeth that have served their day in the mouths of others, and are prepared to do yeoman service for those who have had the misfortune to have lost theirs. But the man's hope of gain lies not in his herbs nor his concoctions, but in his wits. A knot of rustics gathers around him, and keen-eyed and with a smile in his heart he scans the faces of the crowd as they stand before him. One man seems particularly green, and the quack sees in him a splendid subject on whom to work, so he opens with : " My dear sir, you must please excuse me for addressing you, but I feel I really must speak to you. Do you know that you are suffering from a disease that at any moment may prove fatal to you? You may not have realised this, but my professional training enables me to see in what a very precarious condition you are." The countryman is startled, and his face turns to a greenish-yellow. A tremor passes over him, and perspiration starts from every pore. He suddenly begins to feel quite unwell. He looks round on the people at his side in a kind of dazed way, whilst they nod and whisper to each other that the man after all does look as though there was something serious the matter with him.

To increase the effect the quack says, " Put out your tongue." The man, shaking with fear, nervously protrudes it. It is as red as a beet, but no one in the crowd knows what is a good tongue or what is a bad one. "See," says the doctor, "what an awful tongue the man has got! The disease is working fast, and he may thank his stars that he has met me to-day, for I have the very medicine that will cure him. I know his case well, for I have been the means of saving many a poor fellow just like him who but for me would have been in his grave long ago." A look of relief passes over the face of the countryman when he realises that this clever doctor has just the medicine that will heal him. He eagerly buys a number of his pills, and he leaves for home to tell his wife what a wonderful discovery he has made to-day, and how, but for the doctor's skill, he would be a dead man in a few days.

The character of these quacks is well known, and yet there are always plenty of dupes ready to be taken in by them. When a Chinese is sick he is prepared to take any medicine or any advice that a person with a ready tongue will advise him to adopt. It no doubt speaks well for the soundness of the Chinese constitution that in spite of untrained doctors, quacks, amateurs, and lying mediums the people of this empire are as healthy and robust as they are to-day. China is a signal instance of the mighty power of Nature to keep a people well, not simply without trained medical men but in the face of the crassest and rudest treatment that ever hurried men to their graves.

CHAPTER XV

MONEY AND MONEY-LENDING

THE great mass of the Chinese people are in a chronic state of debt. It seems to be the natural and normal state in which a Chinese passes his life. He is born into it ; he grows up in it ; he goes to school with it ; he marries in it ; and he ultimately leaves the world with the shadow of it resting on him in his last moments.

This state of things does not seem to depress him in the least. It is a phase common to at least three-fifths of the whole community. Like the smells that have come down in legitimate succession from the past, and dwell in the homes, and take up their permanent abode in the streets and alley-ways of every town and hamlet in the empire, so debt is one of the heirlooms that has been bequeathed by the ancestors of this people to their posterity. No one is ashamed of being in debt, for as everybody knows his neighbour's business in China, any attempt to conceal the fact would be met with absolute failure. The very fact that debt is a permanent institution in the country may be a reason why men so light-heartedly incur it, when they are perfectly conscious that it will embarrass them for many a long year to come.

A man, for example, is arranging for the marriage of his son. This is always an expensive affair. There is the dowry to be paid for the bride, and there are certain feasts that must be given at the wedding in order that the " face " of the family may be maintained. All this requires ready money to meet the necessary expenses incidental to the carrying out of the marriage plans, but this he has not got. The question now arises, where is it to come from? The father is, perhaps, already in debt. An Englishman would think twice before venturing on such a perilous course as adding to his responsibilities. A Chinese looks at the thing differently. The marriage must take place and the inevitable feasts must be given. Scores of people, many of whom he does not care a button for, but who have to be invited for form's sake, will eat and drink him into poverty, and yet, with a mind that absolutely refuses to think of the future, he will go round and borrow the sum that is to be lavished upon what, but for "face," might nearly all have been saved.

The Chinese is a mystery. Usually he is what might be called "stingy with his money." Every cash[1] is looked upon solemnly and with concern. He will haggle over that smallest and only coin in the realm, as though to save one were a matter of supreme importance. Long discussions will take place and noisy altercations, all about whether half a dozen cash more or less should be saved in some disputed case. Englishmen will dispute about shillings, but not about farthings, but a shilling is a magnificent sum to a Chinese. It actually contains five hundred of these precious cash of his, which are quite sufficient to support in comparative luxury a middle-class family for two or three days. Every cash, therefore, in ordinary circumstances, is a matter of moment to him; but when it comes to a marriage, or some occasion where the "face" of a family is involved, he will spend the dollars, each of which is worth one thousand cash, with as lavish a hand as though he were an Englishman who had the Bank of England at his back.

A month after the event, which was declared to be a prodigious success by every one who was present, and to have added immensely to the family "face," the creditor with footsteps sure as fate comes round for his interest. The probability is that the man has no ready money to pay it, and a delay of a month is asked, with the assurance that the two months' interest will be paid at the same time. This request is readily granted, but it is only the commencement of a long series of pecuniary struggles that get more and more severe as the interest gradually accumulates, and becoming compound, actually assumes a more threatening aspect than does the original sum that was first borrowed. As long as the interest is paid somewhat regularly, things go on quite smoothly, but when money becomes short, so that neither it nor the principal is forthcoming, there are apt to be stormy scenes, and, in order to get rid of his importunate creditor, an appeal has to be made to other money-lenders to advance a sum sufficient to pay him off.

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[1] A cash is about the one-thousandth part of two shillings.

These money-lenders are not a distinct class such as exist in England, but they are every one who has any spare cash at his disposal. A servant woman has saved a dollar out of her wages, and she at once looks round for some one with whom she can invest it. A coolie finds himself with a surplus of three dollars, and he lends them to some neighbour who is needing just that amount. The whole Chinese empire may be said to be in a perpetual state of borrowing and lending, and a large majority of its people are daily concerned with that most practical question how they shall pay the interest to the minority who have lent them money.

A Chinese is one of the keenest of business men and knows the reproducing power of money. He never dreams of hiding it away in some cupboard or in a long stocking. He would think it the sheerest folly to do anything of the kind. It is the same with men who have considerable sums at their command. They are shy of banks that have a habit of breaking, and besides they can do better with needy farmers or householders, who can give them good security in the shape of goods—deeds on their fields or houses that can be seized should there be any difficulty about paying up principal or interest. The lack of mutual confidence causes the rate of interest to be very high. Where first-class security can be given, the charge is 12 per cent. This is considered low, and is accepted because there are no risks. The percentage rises with the decrease in the value of the security, till 36 per cent. is demanded.

The sorrow caused by poverty and the inability to pay their creditors is felt by the very poor, but where there are any very young children the strain falls most heavily upon them. In order to satisfy the demands of those to whom they owe money, the poor are very often compelled to sell their children in order to be able to retain their home and the few fields that have been left them by their fathers. A man, for example, has an only son, four or five years old. When his creditor comes to him and demands payment and is told that he has nothing with which he can pay him, he simply points to the debtor's son and suggests that the solution of his difficulties lies ready to his hand. "Sell him," he says, "and you can pay me what you owe and have a little over with which you can start afresh."

When the evening has closed in, and the village is shrouded in shadows, and the little fellow that they love almost as their own lives is sleeping the peaceful sleep of childhood, the father and mother talk in whispers about the awful tragedy that is going to darken their lives. The child must be sacrificed to save their home, for their creditor has no mercy and no compassion, and he will never rest till he has wrung his money out of them. To-morrow morning comes and the little fellow is led away by his father to see the sights, so he tells him, of the great city that lies a few miles away. The mother's heart is fit to break as she looks upon the lad for the last time. Moved by her agony, he clings to her, and will not leave her, but the father tells him of the fine things he is going to see and the beautiful presents he will bring back to his mother. With a child's romantic thoughts of the great town where all the wonders of the world are collected, he trots off with a smiling face, though the tear-drops still glisten between his eyelids.

Arrived in the city, he is at once in fairyland. Such shops and such toys and such crowds of men he never saw before. His father takes him into a large house that seems to him wonderfully grand, but somehow or other the people are not so nice to him as those in his own poor home. Not one face shows the look of love that filled the eyes of his mother every time she gazed upon him. He shrinks closer to his father's side, and wonders why he stays so long there. A man sits at a table and writes words that he occasionally reads aloud. Little does he dream that the pen that glides so easily down the page is forging fetters that shall bind him for ever to the new home, and is snapping at the same time the Divine tie that knits him to his father and mother.

The deed of sale is at last finished and signed by his father. A certain sum of money, say about seven pounds sterling, is handed over to him, and the document that defies the eternal laws of God is put away in a place of safety.

To pacify the little fellow, the father tells him that he is going out a short time, and that he must be a good boy, and that he will come back and take him home to his mother. The lad keeps a wistful eye upon the door, and starts at every approaching footstep, but never more will he catch sight of his father, and never again will the loving eyes of his mother awaken dreams of happiness in his young heart.

This is no fanciful picture that I have been drawing. It is one from real life, and yet it is not so sad a one as when the daughter is disposed of for the same reason. The boy is sold to become a son ; and socially he is placed in a better position than ever he could have been had he remained in his own home. The girl, on the other hand, becomes a slave and loses her freedom. Her master can do as he likes with her. He can treat her kindly or he can make her life a misery, and whenever he chooses he can sell her to another. Her parents, from the moment that the deed of sale has been executed and the purchase money handed over to them, have no more control over her than if they had sold a cow or a horse which became the absolute property of the purchaser.

Another very common way of raising money is by resorting to the pawnshop. This is specially the case with the poorer people who want to borrow small sums for immediate use, and for which they can give no security excepting clothes and household furniture such as they have at their own disposal. These institutions exist all over the country, and are found, not only in the large cities but also in the rural districts. They are generally owned by some wealthy clans that have sufficient influence to protect themselves from the squeezes of the mandarins and the attacks of robbers.

In China it is no light matter to be the owner of a pawnshop. The mandarins of the district, who are always on the lookout to see in what way they can enrich themselves, have their eyes continually on it. Like a hawk that hovers in the air looking out for its prey, so these gentry wait for some chance to pounce upon the pawnbroker to relieve him of surplus cash. All the bad characters, too, of the neighbourhood look with envious eyes upon the rich mine of wealth that lies hidden within the walls of the pawnshop. In ordinary times, when the mandarin's rule is rigorous, no attempt is made upon it. Any relaxation, however, in administering the laws becomes an encouragement to the opium-smokers and gamblers and villains of a region, and some dark night fifty or sixty of them will band together to storm the place and plunder it.

In order to be prepared for such contingencies, it is built very strongly, and fortified as though it were a castle. There is only one entrance to it, and the framework of this is made of strong blocks of granite, whilst the door is constructed of thick planks of wood, and secured by heavy locks and huge cross-bars fixed transversely across it on the inside. An ample supply, moreover, of guns and ammunition is prepared to enable it to stand a siege. In spite of all these precautions, it often happens that the band of robbers win their way into the inside through the death of some of its defenders, and then they carry off sufficient spoil to enable them to live a dissipated life for months to come.

In addition to these large establishments with great influence and wealth behind them, there are, in every city, smaller shops with a limited capital, which advance small sums to the very poorest, whose belongings would not be accepted by the richer places. It is the very dregs of society that in their extreme poverty come to these with their poor, almost worn-out garments to get a few cash to enable them to tide over the day.

The rate of interest charged by all is 2 per cent. a month, but on woollen goods it rises to 3 per cent., because the risk is greater, since they are more likely to become mouldy, and so lose their market value in case they are not redeemed. In the larger shops the goods must be taken out before the expiry of three years and four months. After that time the owners have no more claim upon them, and they may be sold for the benefit of the house. In order that the goods may not suffer from damp, &c., during the time they are in pawn, it is the custom, as well as the law, that the pawnbroker shall have them sunned at regular intervals. If he neglects to do this and the articles are soiled, the owners may claim their value in the courts of law.

In the smaller shops the time limit is only four months. From this may be inferred the character of the articles that are taken in pawn. They have been worn to the very limit of endurance, and they have become so ingrained with dirt and grease that to allow them to remain for any longer period on the shelves would cause them to deteriorate to such an extent that they would actually become valueless.

The larger pawnshops act also as money-lenders, though this is not their main business. Those in the country lend to poor farmers, who are always short of cash, and who, with the recklessness of the average Chinese, are prepared to borrow sums that they must know they can never repay without immense suffering to themselves. The interest demanded is paid out of the crops when they are gathered, and a representative of the pawnshop stands in the fields and takes its value in grain or in sweet potatoes as these are harvested by the debtor. This interest is always a first charge upon the produce of the farm, and must be paid, though the family may be standing by with tearful eyes, sullen faces, and aching hearts, as they see starvation stalking towards them, whilst the servants of the pawnshop carry off the larger portion of the crop on which their very lives depend.

When the harvests are abundant, the collection of the interest brings less suffering; but when the rain fails and the great, red, hot sun looks down with rays that scorch and burn the poor suffering crops, that shrink and shrivel up until only a fraction of them can be gathered, then the most piteous and affecting scenes may be witnessed. These, however, never touch the heart of the pawnshop. That is conducted on stern business lines, and such things as sentiment or kindly generous feelings are never allowed to cross the counter, or interfere with the money transactions of the establishment.

One of the things that strike an Englishman in China is the utter heartlessness of the richer classes for the poor, in times when droughts or famine or mighty floods render their condition desperate. An Englishman's first impulse in such circumstances is to dive his hands deep into his pockets and give a subscription to help the sufferers. A rich Chinese has no such generous instinct.

His barns may be full of grain, which he has stored in anticipation, and the people may be dying by hundreds of starvation in the districts around, but not a grain goes out to save a single life. He will sell at famine prices, but as for bestowing any of his precious store upon the men and women and little ones who are crying out piteously for food, he will never dream of doing anything so romantic or absurd.

Instances are constantly occurring of the heartlessness of the rich towards the poor, and especially of these pawnbrokers, who, utterly ignoring the kindlier instincts of human nature, extract their pound of flesh without mercy and without pity. A case in point will illustrate this fact.

A widow who owned a small farm had occasion to borrow some money from one of these men, with the agreement that the interest should be paid in kind when the crops were gathered. Unfortunately, it was a bad year, and when she had harvested her rice and potatoes she found that after the pawnshop had taken its share, there would not be enough left to maintain herself and her children till the next harvest was gathered. In terror at the prospect, she managed to secrete some of her corn, but the sharp eyes of the representative of the pawnshop quickly detected what she had done, and he and his men searched the premises and discovered the precious hoard she had hidden away. The discovery turned out to be the beginning of a tragedy that was to bring disaster upon both the widow and the pawnshop. The former, heart-broken at the prospect before her, determined to put an end to her sorrows at once, and so she committed suicide. Her relatives at once laid a complaint before the local mandarin, and accused the pawnbroker of having been the cause of the death of the widow, and they claimed substantial damages from him. These he was willing to pay, and happy would he have been had the case been allowed to be settled on such easy terms.

A new element had in the meantime been imported into the matter, and that was the mandarin. He had long wished to be able to lay his hands on so fat a goose as the pawnshop, and pluck it to his heart's content. His chance had now come. He pretended to be highly indignant at the conduct of the pawnbroker. He had violated all the instincts of humanity; he declared that he had sinned against Heaven and had driven a poor unfortunate woman, who had no husband to defend her, to her death. A striking example must be made of him so that others would fear to imitate his heartless conduct. The end of the matter was that he was so squeezed by the official and his satellites that he was finally ruined and his establishment broken up.

Common report held that his punishment for his cruel treatment of the widow did not end with the loss of his property. Two or three years after, his son suddenly became insane and died a horrible death. Every one believed that this tragic event was caused by the spirit of the dead woman, who, in her desire to wreak her vengeance on the man who had caused her death, had hurled this terrible calamity upon the son.

A rich money-lender in the neighbourhood, hearing of his death, conscience-stricken, immediately gave notice to all his debtors that he forgave them any interest that might be owing him. He was terrified lest the spirits of some of those whom he had tortured when they were in life should come and avenge their wrongs on himself or some member of his family, and he hoped, by this timely act of repentance, to avert their wrath.

The standard currency of the Chinese that prevails throughout the empire is the tael, about one ounce weight of silver; all books are kept, and all business transactions are conducted, on this basis. There is no coin that represents a tael, but ingots of silver, weighing so many taels, are carried by persons who are travelling and can be exchanged for cash at any of the money-changers' shops that swarm throughout the country. If a person does not wish to change the whole of his ingot, he can chop off as large or as small a bit as he likes from it, and the money-changer will weigh it and give him its equivalent in cash.

In ordinary every-day life, where people have to make small purchases, the tael, as a buying power, is not brought into requisition. It flies too far above the heads of vast numbers of the community, and so the Government has issued copper cash, the only minted coins recognised by it. They are about the size of a shilling, with a square hole in the centre, to permit of their being strung in hundreds. Ten of these hundreds make a dollar, which is worth about two shillings. It will thus be seen that a cash is of very small value, being the one-thousandth part of a dollar.

Foreigners in China, finding it exceedingly inconvenient to carry on business with lumps of silver, or with the unwieldy cash, introduced the Mexican dollar as the medium of currency, still retaining the tael, however, as the standard by which the relative value of the dollar was to be estimated. Its use only extends to the places where foreigners reside or foreign trade has largely penetrated. Beyond these only the tael and the cash are recognised.

For the great mass of the people, the real and only currency is the cash. The tael is what might be called the aristocratic medium, for it deals with the revenue of the empire, and is familiar with fat, plethoric ledgers, and is always present at the sale or transfer of land. In great political transactions where millions are concerned, it is the only force that is recognised, whilst in the fluctuations of the Chinese stock exchange, in the various provinces, the variations in the money market centre around it.

The cash, on the other hand, is the plebeian coin. It is the friend and the ally of the very poorest. The beggarman has always a few in his pouch. The labouring man, who would never dream of taels, thinks himself well paid for a long day's toil if he gets two hundred cash. A skilled workman will close the day with smiles upon his face when he carries home three hundred, and hands them to his wife to meet the expenses of the household, and her eyes will glisten as she looks upon the generous sum that her husband has given her.

A man goes to market with a string of cash ostentatiously thrown over his shoulder, as though he would intimate to the shopkeepers that ready money was the thing he was going to deal in to-day, and that, therefore, they must pay great deference to him. He buys a pound of rice for thirty cash, a pound of sweet potatoes for ten, a pound of fish for one hundred and twenty, and vegetables enough for the whole family, some of them fresh from the farmers' fields and others with a peculiar odour, as though they had been pickled in the ark and had been lying around in some dark, damp place ever since, for fifty. But perhaps to-day is a festival, and he means to make merry with his family, so he buys a fowl for three hundred and fifty and a pint of samshu for sixty. He must have some cakes, so he buys a few common ones at one cash apiece, others, nice and flaky with sweetmeats cunningly hidden in their hearts, at five cash each. For the children he buys a dozen pieces of toffee, crisp and appetising, at one cash each. As dessert he chooses half a dozen oranges at five cash each and a pineapple for thirty. After he has bought enough for the feast he has still a few remaining hundreds left of the thousand that hung so carelessly over his shoulder as he marched to the market to make his purchases.

The cash is essentially a poor man's coin and always casts a kindly glance upon the man who is struggling with poverty and who can barely buy enough to live in a decent kind of way. Cash [1] utterly refuse to become respectable or to accumulate in any large quantity. They demur to being carried about the person, excepting in such limited quantities as suit the purse of a poor man. The moment you overstep the limit they become an intolerable burden and you wish to change them into dollars or taels, but then you step out of the region of the poor, who never finger such aristocratic coins. If a man were going on a long and expensive journey and planned to take fifty pounds in cash to meet his expenses, he would have to hire a donkey to carry them, and at the same time engage two soldiers with loaded guns to keep them from being plundered by the way. He would never do anything so foolish. He would elect to take silver taels that he could hide away among his clothes, and he would gradually change these into humble cash as he from time to time wished to make his purchases. The cash is a necessity of life in China. It is a precious medium for all, but especially for the poor, whom it always has in its eye, and it proves a real friend to these by enabling them to buy many articles without which they could not live.

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[1] A thousand cash weigh about 2 lb.

CHAPTER XVI

PLAYS AND PLAY-ACTORS

THE great national and universal amusement of the Chinese is theatricals. Whatever other methods of recreation there may be that are used to divert the leisure hours of the people, there is none that, for a moment, can be compared with these. They are the ideal form of enjoyment ; and rich and poor, the most learned scholar as well as the most illiterate rustic, all look upon the stage as the supreme place of joy, where men's thoughts are diverted, and where, for a time at least, the sorrows of the heart are banished.

It is at the foot of the stage that the commonest people can revel in scenes where royal personages appear, and where statesmen whose names are household words come forth out of the mystery of the past, and, for once in the hearing of the crowds, make the famous speeches that have rendered them immortal. Ancient dynasties that have long since passed away live again before the eyes of the men of this generation, and warriors and emperors, in the regal habits and the armour of the times in which they lived, once more enact some of the famous scenes that the pen of the historian or the song of the poet has handed down to posterity.

This mode of enjoyment is in profound harmony with the antique character of the Chinese mind, which revels in all that belongs to the far-off past. Men revere the classics very largely because they were written in the early dawn of Chinese history. The worthies and sages that are the models for everything that is perfect in life would lose much of their power could they be transformed into men of the present day. Antiquity has cast an aureole around their brows that transfigures them, and helps to make them the recognised "teachers of a thousand generations." An old carving of an ancient bowl—in fact, anything that has the stamp of age upon it—is a thing to be looked upon with hushed reverence ; and so these historical plays are gazed upon with a mixture of awe, because they bring back the buried past and reproduce figures that have long since vanished from life.

The occasions on which the plays are performed are numerous. A rich man's birthday comes round. This must be celebrated by a feast and a play. Nothing in the whole round of the imagination of the Chinese could surpass these for the pure and unalloyed happiness they would give. A feast alone would be divine, but the addition of a play would add a zest to it that none of the guests would ever forget. A play, accordingly, is arranged for, and the finest actors that money can procure are engaged, and the rich man and his family with their guests are sent into raptures of delight, whilst the great public share in the rejoicings of the day and heartily wish that a rich man's birthday would only come round every day in the year.

The most fruitful source, however, of theatricals is the idols. The Chinese have endowed all these with decidedly human passions. They are exceedingly fond of money, and, like the men that worship them, they are believed to be ready to perform any service if only they are properly paid. They have an abstract preference for good, but, if the bribe be heavy enough, they are prepared to desert the right and in the most unblushing manner confer their blessing on the villain. Their pleasures run, too, in the same line as that of their worshippers, and there is nothing that will put an idol on such good terms with everybody as a rousing play, when there are lots of fun and noise, screeching music and clang of cymbals, beat of drum, and hilarious amusement.

The birthday, for example, of the public idol in a popular temple comes round. He is a god with a reputation. He has sent blessings into many a home, the people say, and men speak with feeling of the remarkable answers that have been given to their petitions. Out of gratitude for all this, and with a keen eye to the future, special preparations are made to do honour to him. There is a feeling that if this be not done the idol will revenge himself on society by sending some great calamity that will put the community into mourning. This danger must not on any account be risked. The god must be put into a good humour, and so arrangements are made for making his birthday a pleasant one—so pleasant, indeed, that when the worshippers come by and by with their endless requests he will remember the happy day they gave him and will lavish his gifts upon them. One of the main factors in this elaborate preparation is a play. The Chinese are an exceedingly practical people and, like many Occidentals, endeavour to combine religion with business. The killing of two birds with one stone, especially when it brings grist to the mill, is an ideal act that puts a twinkle into the Chinese eye and a sweet and childlike smile into the yellow, sphinxlike face.

It is a very extraordinary fact that though the nation has this profound love for theatricals, actors are looked down upon with contempt by every class of society. Their profession is considered to be so disreputable that their children are not allowed to enter the public examinations for any of the four literary degrees. They consequently can never become recognised scholars, nor take any position under the Government. Whatever may be the causes, there is no question but that play-acting has a decidedly bad moral effect upon the men who get their living by it. They are generally opium-smokers, gamblers, and prodigals of the lowest type. A look at their faces is enough to convince one that they are men who have no character to lose, for they have a dissipated air that has settled permanently on their features. The circumstances in which they live are, no doubt, largely responsible for the vices into which they have fallen. They have a great deal of spare time on their hands. They are illiterate and predisposed by the very character their profession bears to spend it in a low and vicious mode of living, and as their money comes easily so it is spent with a liberal hand, the consequence being that there is often only a step between them and absolute poverty.

Actors in China are divided into four classes. The first are those that take the parts of mandarins or royal personages. Such persons require to have an easy, dignified carriage, suitable to the exalted characters they have to impersonate. They must naturally have that polished, graceful swing that is a sign in this land either of literary culture or of blue blood, so that when they are representing some distinguished personage they may not shame him by some plebeian habits that would set the audience in a roar of laughter. The second are those who assume the rôle of female slaves or of women in common life. As women are not allowed to appear on the stage in China, the parts representing them have to be taken by men. The third are those who personate ladies in respectable life, and they dress up to imitate them so exactly that a stranger to Chinese ways would never discover that they were not women. Their whole get-up is absolutely perfect. The dressing of the hair, the binding of the feet to imitate the "golden lilies" of the upper classes, the hang of the dress, and the feminine mincing gait that is the result of the crushing of the feet—all are lifelike and natural. The fourth is what we might really call the clown, though he has no grotesque or laughter-provoking dress, such as distinguishes the same character in the West. He is a man who is naturally full of humour, and whose face easily takes a facetious look. He is constantly ready at certain parts of the play with jokes and repartee that send the crowd into fits of laughter. His face is quite enough to destroy any seriousness that may exist in the audience, and it is so flexible and the movement of a few muscles will so touch the people with a sense of the ludicrous that they will have to hold their sides to prevent them from splitting.

Of the above classes the one that represents the high-class lady is the best paid. An actor who takes this part, especially if he be a distinguished one, is a most popular character, and the announcement that he is going to appear in a certain play will bring the people from far and near to witness his performance.

Every actor has to go through a severe course of training by specially qualified masters before he is allowed to take a leading part in any play. As a rule, he begins as a boy. The manager of a troupe will either buy some lads from their parents or he will have them indentured to him for a term of years. They are at once set to study the play in which boys can take a part. The masters that train them are very strict, and often punish them most cruelly for mistakes or carelessness in failing to get by heart the pieces they have to learn. After they have advanced in their studies they are put on an easy piece, where they have to take a more or less prominent part. They thus gain confidence and get rid of that nervous feeling that makes them afraid to face the public. At length after years of experience they gradually learn their profession and they are then prepared to take any part in that particular line for which they have shown a marked aptitude.

The Chinese plays may be roughly divided into two great classes. The first of these deals entirely with what may be called historical subjects, whilst the other has to do with the comedies and tragedies of everyday life. It may be remarked here that, in tracing back the history of the present Chinese drama, there is a universal consensus of opinion that the puppet shows that are still most popular throughout the empire were the original from which it has sprung. That this is believed to be the case is evidenced by the fact that usually before the commencement of any play the audience is treated to a puppet-show display, not because it is part of the programme but as a memorial tribute to the men of ancient times who had the inventive genius and also the goodness of heart to employ their great powers in devising a never-ending source of amusement and entertainment for the benefit of posterity.

The historical plays, as already stated, are entirely concerned with the great and striking events that have marked the history of the past. Many of the most exciting of these deal with the stories of well-known heroes who came forth to save the empire when, perhaps, the barbarians of the North had invaded China and were carrying fire and sword amongst the people inhabiting the provinces lying nearest the home of the robbers. The fierce struggle in which the untamed hordes of Huns or Mongols are driven back with terrific slaughter into the steppes from which they had issued is brought in a most realistic manner before the audience, as the actors, entering into the spirit of the murderous contest, play their parts with consummate ability and with the highest enthusiasm. Chinese history abounds in scenes that have been dramatised. The theatre has thus been the means, not only of educating the common people, who are mostly illiterate, in the great events of the past, but also of keeping up the national worship of the heroes and heroines who have played so mighty a part in the days that have long since passed away.

These theatricals have had a most unhappy influence in keeping alive and intensifying the inborn hatred of the Chinese against all foreigners. From the earliest dawn of their history the nation has suffered most grievously from the inroads of the savage and hostile tribes that have lived across the northern and western borders. Huns and Mongols, and Kins and Tartars have successively inflicted the most terrible disasters upon the empire. They have slaughtered the people, ravaged their towns, and left them smoking ruins. They carried off thousands of the inhabitants and even some of the emperors into captivity, where they died far away from their families and from their kingdom. At two different times the country was subjugated by these marauding foes, and the Mongol and Manchu dynasties displaced the native rulers of the country. It is not to be wondered at, therefore, that a most bitter hatred lies slumbering in the heart of every Chinese to-day against all foreigners of whatsoever nationality. The story of the past has been transmitted with Oriental fidelity from father to son, and from generation to generation, and the bloody details have sunk deep into the heart of every inhabitant of this vast empire, and revenge for all the sorrows and woes that the barbarians have brought upon China is the one predominant feeling in the heart of its people.

Now, these historical plays have been the means of intensifying the bitterness and contempt of the people against the foreigner. They are acted everywhere—in the quiet village, in the homes of the rich, in the crowded cities, and in the busy market towns. Everywhere, indeed, throughout the length and breadth of the land the story of plunderings and massacres done upon their innocent forefathers is vividly portrayed with all the passion and dramatic power that the actors possess. In these plays everything is done to make the barbarian as hateful and contemptible as possible. He is represented as a monster in appearance. His face is dragged out of shape, and his mouth is made to appear near his ear. His beard on one side is red and on the other blue. His eyes are fierce and staring, and savagery and murder are stamped upon his hideous features. That is the conception that the people in the interior, who have never come into actual contact with the foreigner, have of the hated barbarian.[1] To their minds, there is no distinction between one foreigner and another. English, French, or German are all alike barbarians, to be destroyed and murdered as the savages in former days slaughtered their forefathers.

The second class of plays deals, as I have already described, with a larger variety of subjects, having the whole of human life as the field on which to practise. They are, consequently, much more popular and at the same time much less expensive. The reason for this latter is because the dresses of the actors are much more simple than those in the historical plays, where the robes of mandarins and statesmen that appear on the stage are exceedingly costly.

With regard to the scenery, it is the same in both sets of plays, for in both cases it is left entirely to the imagination of the audience. As the plays are almost always acted in the open air it is, of course, impossible to add to the effect of the stage by any ingenuity of the painter's art. The Chinese, however, who is by no means wanting in the artistic faculty, knows well how to take advantage of the exquisite combinations that Nature with her cunning hand so often works out as though she had made them for his particular benefit. The leader of the troupe comes along with his band to select a spot where they shall have their performance. They are as dilapidated-looking a company as ever met to thrill an audience with thoughts of noble deeds, or to melt it into tears with some pathetic story of human suffering. Vice sits upon the countenance of every man amongst them, and pale cheeks, bloodless lips, and leaden-hued eyes tell of long hours in the opium-den, and the miserable, wretched feelings that follow the brief Elysium where they drowned the thoughts of life in the gorgeous visions that fled with the morning light. What can these men know of art and lights and shadows and the mysterious movements of Nature that will set off their acting by and by better than the inspired genius of the most famous painters could ever do? One looks at the place where the stage is expected to be set up, and with an instinct that never fails, he chooses the very spot where the sun can best play the artist, and where he can flash his rays and throw in his tints to cover somewhat the defects of the players.

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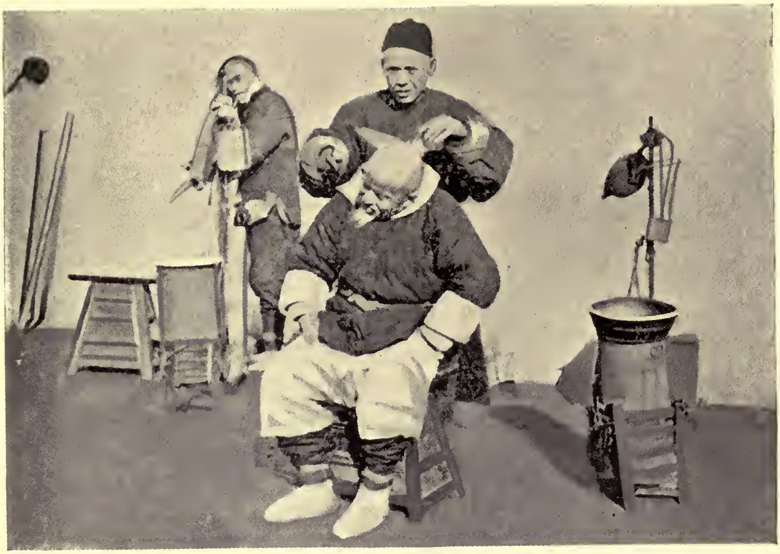
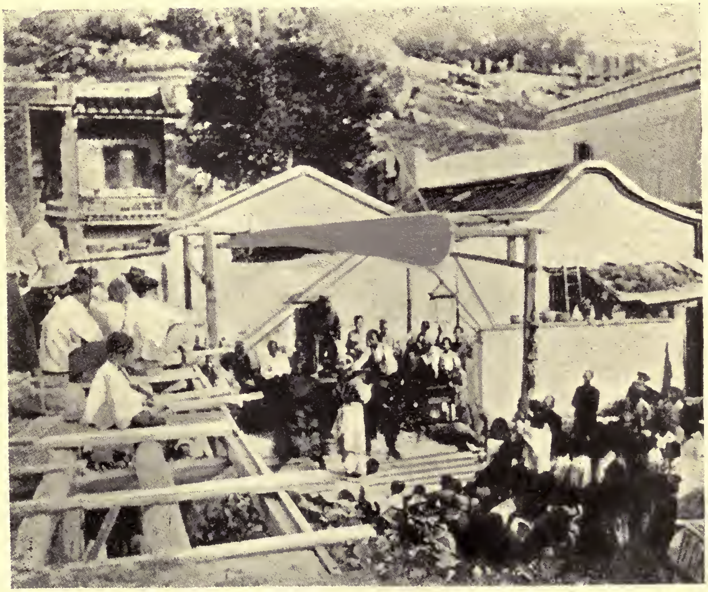
[1] "Barbarian" is the generic term that is given to all foreigners, whether from the Far West or from the countries bordering upon China. "Foreign devil," "red-haired devil" are merely local variations that people of different districts playfully apply to foreigners of any nationality. They are all terms of reproach.

When it is possible, a large tree is selected ; the older and more venerable it is the better ; for the background it affords, whilst it is grand and imposing, is an ever changing one. At one moment it is filled with shadows that give it a stern and severe look ; at another the golden rays flash and play amongst the great boughs and give it a summer look ; and anon a flood of light comes in a great wave and touches the leaves with such a sudden access of beauty that they tremble with excitement and seem a fitting accompaniment to the sounds of cymbals and the passionate voices of the actors as they play their parts below. The day goes on, the plot thickens, and the excitement of the audience grows as the hero makes his marvellous escapes from the machinations of his enemies, and every other interest is forgotten in the absorbing one of seeing how the villain will at last be discovered and punished. All this while the tree, as if conscious of the part it has to play in the *dénouement* of the plot, silently but with an eloquence that no language could imitate, has added to the zest of the piece. The gentle sound of the breeze blowing through the branches, the sudden lighting up of smiles amongst its



A MORNING SHAVE.



A THEATRE ON THE ROAD-SIDE.

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leaves, and their dying out in sadness that quenches the sunlight out of their eyes, seem like unspoken words that add a vividness and a mystery to those of the actors that would otherwise seem tame and ineffective without them.

But it is not always that so picturesque a spot can be obtained for the acting of the play. These Bohemian play-actors have to be prepared to erect their stage in front of the house of their patron, however unsuitable the place may be from an æsthetic or an acoustic point of view. It very often happens that his home may be in a densely crowded street, where the only background consists of faded, broken-down-looking houses, and the only suggestions to high art are dirt and filth and smells so atrocious that they could easily knock off the head of an English donkey. These exercise no depressing effect whatever on these men, true descendants of the founders of the Thespian art. Place and surroundings seem to be utterly indifferent to them. It is men they want, and the sympathy of crowds, and the subtle influence of an audience that has been set on fire by their eloquence, and whose hearts can be easily moved to laughter or to tears.

An English troupe of the present day would be utterly lost were they set down to meet the conditions that are the only ones that the great race of actors throughout this empire are acquainted with. Just imagine a swell London company who were assembled ready to perform some popular play. Nothing has been prepared for the great performance. There is no theatre and no magnificent scenery which first-rate artists have painted to give the highest effects to the efforts of the actors. There is no place where rehearsals may take place, and no retiring-rooms, where each one may dress himself for the part he is to take when he steps on to the stage before the crowds that are awaiting his coming. The troupe would meet by common consent, say in the Strand or in the most crowded part of Oxford Street, where they would at once proceed to put up their stage. All traffic would have to be suspended. The drivers of omnibuses and of hansom-cabs, scenting the obstruction from afar, would quietly and without the least show of temper turn their horses down the nearest by-street; whilst the fares, when they heard the reason, would smile and express themselves perfectly satisfied at their conduct. Great lumbering carts and drays, unconscious of the stoppage, would come up to the edge of the crowd that had gathered round the troupe, to see Sir Henry Irving, for example, superintending the placing of the boards in their proper position. A delightful smile that they never showed even to their wives would immediately suffuse their faces, and they would back away to the nearest side road, which would necessitate an extra journey of, perhaps, half a mile or more. Pedestrians, too, would come up and would crane their necks and peer over the heads of the people to find out the cause of the obstruction and then retire with an amused look on their faces. Others in a hurry to catch a train would wriggle through the crowd and crouch and scramble under the stage, where they would bump their heads against projecting beams—without, however, affecting their tempers in the least.

In the meanwhile the members of the troupe are preparing themselves for the performance. The play is a comedy, perhaps, and each one is dressing for his part. Here is one painting her eyebrows and touching her lips with delicate shades of carmine. Another is doing up her long luxurious hair into a wonderful coiffure, whilst her neighbour is adorning herself in a rich dress that shows off her beauty to perfection. The men, less picturesque in appearance, are donning the garments in which they are to appear, with a nonchalance and an ease that show that they are perfectly impervious to the opinion of the crowd that is looking on with wonder in its eyes.

The above is an exact picture of what takes place in China, outside of the great ports where the influence of foreigners has tended to modify the native customs. The stage is erected in the very midst of the most populous thoroughfare and all traffic is absolutely suspended. The actors do their dressing in public, and the men that are to take the part of women paint their faces and do up their hair in the elaborate fashion in which ladies are accustomed to in this land. Everything is done, as it were, on the street, and good-humour and infinite forbearance are the characteristics that mark the conduct of the populace in reference to what would seem to us to be the high-handed proceedings of the play-acting fraternity. Comedy, on the whole, suits the genius of the Chinese better than the more serious plays. They are a laughter-loving people, and their faces have been so formed that, unæsthetic as they are, they have a wide area on which to spread a smile. There is a strain of fun that runs through their natures that makes them quick to catch the slightest hint of a joke, and that sends the laughter rippling from their hearts and lighting up their features with floods of sunshine. The number of these comedies is legion, and in order to give the reader some idea of what they are like, I will select one and give a brief account of it. It is called "Sir Serious." The hero of the story is a famous Taoist doctor, renowned for his learning and for his power over spirits. He is not only a scholar of the first order, but he has also so entered into the secret of Nature that he can at pleasure transform himself into any shape he pleases, and by his magic he can perform the most wonderful miracles. Demons and fairies are at his beck, and storm and tempest are forces obedient to his will.

One morning, taking a walk into the country, he observed a young woman standing by a grave and, with tears streaming down her face, slowly and gracefully fanning it. Struck by this sight, he approached her and asked her what she was doing. She explained that her husband had recently died and before his death he had made her promise that she would not marry again before the plaster on his grave had time to dry. "I am anxious to keep my promise," she said, "but as I am very poor and have no means of support, I am helping the tomb to get dry in order to be able to marry again as quickly as possible."

When Sir Serious returned home he told his wife, who was a famous beauty, what he had seen, and remarked that he thought it very noble of the widow for being so faithful in keeping the promise she had made to her dying husband. "Noble, do you call her?" she asked, with a contemptuous toss of her beautiful head. "I call her disgusting. The idea of her being in such a hurry to get married again that she actually fans her husband's grave to cause it to dry more quickly ! She has no decency and no shame ! Now, if it were my case I should never dream of ever getting married again. I should remain faithful to you as long as I lived."

Sir Serious pondered over this statement of his wife and he determined that he would put it to the test. In the course of a few days, without any apparent reason, he suddenly died, to the great grief and consternation of his wife. Next day, whilst she was in the midst of her sorrow, a visitor to her late husband was announced. He was a young man of unusually prepossessing appearance, who had been attracted, so he said, by the fame of Sir Serious and had come to sit at the feet of so distinguished a savant. He appeared to be profoundly moved when he heard that he was dead, and he spoke with such exquisite feeling and condoled with the widow in such chaste and appropriate language that her heart was greatly comforted by what he said.

The handsome young scholar, having come from a long distance, had no place where he could stay, so the widow, after consultation with an old servant of the family, invited him to take up his quarters in her home. The result of a few days' further acquaintance was that they both fell violently in love with each other and after serious love-making they agreed to get married without further delay.

The marriage feast was prepared and sounds of laughter and revelry filled the house and eyes full of happiness sparkled with delight, when suddenly, like a flash of lightning from an unclouded sky, the handsome bridegroom fell to the ground as though he were dead. Every effort was made to revive him, but he could not be awakened out of his deadly trance. His face was deathlike and his breathing had entirely ceased. The newly-made bride summoned her retainer and asked what he would advise should be done in this alarming case. After a long look at the insensible form of the young scholar, he said : " The disease to which this man has succumbed is a very unusual one. I have, however, met with a similar case before, and I was told that the only cure for it was that a man's heart should be obtained and the fluid from it be given, when a perfect recovery would be the result. I would suggest," he continued, "the master's coffin that lies in the next room should be opened and his heart taken out to save the man who is in such a dangerous condition. It seems dreadful," he said, "to suggest such a thing, but Sir Serious is dead and it will not harm him to be opened and have his heart extracted. If we do not adopt this plan I do not see any way by which we can get a heart anywhere else, and so the youth will perish and you will lose a husband a second time."

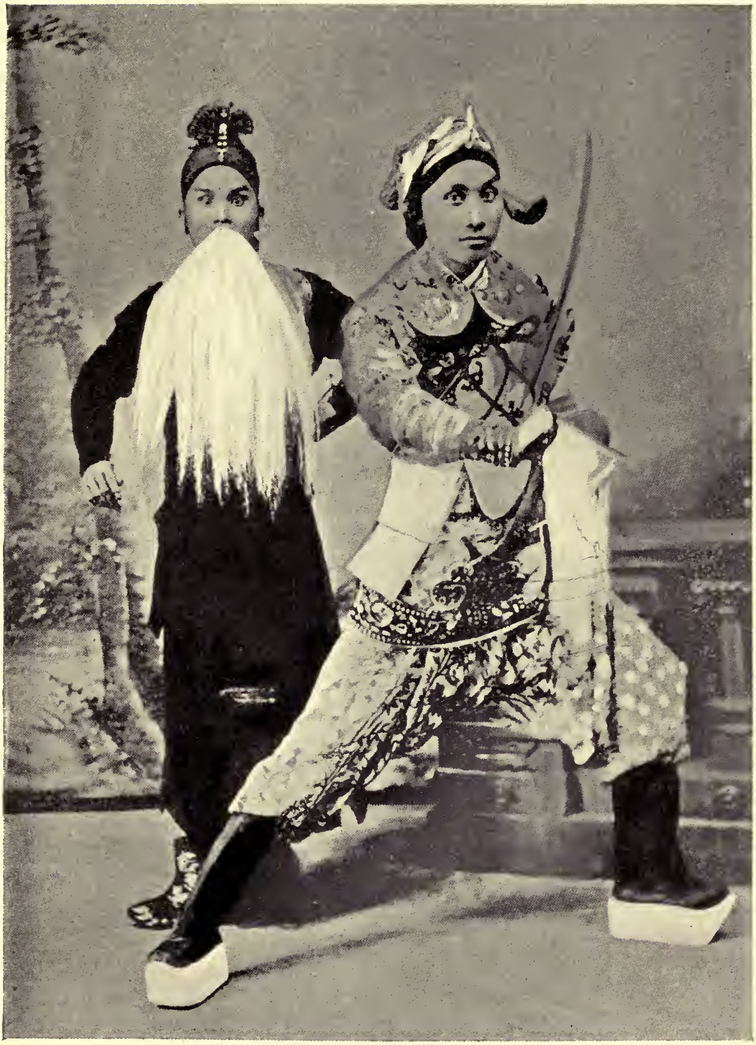
The widow, who was madly in love, at once without any hesitation consented to the proposal. Seizing an axe, she proceeded to the room where the coffin lay, and in a few seconds she had forced the lid open. No sooner had she done this than the dead man sneezed and yawned and, raising his head, he said : "Dear me, I must have been asleep quite a long while. It must be time for me to get up." His wife, horrified beyond measure, rushed back into the next room, but she found the visitor had vanished and not a trace of him could be found anywhere. It was not possible, indeed, that she could do so, seeing that Sir Serious had used his witchery and had transformed himself into the appearance of a young man in order to test his wife and to see whether she would remain true to him as she had declared she would.

The wife was so ashamed when she found that her husband had come to life again that she went and committed suicide. Sir Serious decided, after this painful experience, never to get married again, and in order to comfort men who had lost their wives he composed a short ode that has become famous, through these theatricals, all over the land. His words briefly are : "Do not mourn because your wife has died before you, for think what might happen should you die first. Your wife that you took such pride in would belong to another. Your children that called you father and on whom you lavished your affection would be beaten and ill-used by a man who would take your place. Your home and your lands would pass into the possession of a man who would hate your very memory and who could not bear to hear your name mentioned without a frown. Your wife dies and you lose but her. Everything else is yours and no man may rob you of it. Therefore be of good cheer and remain as you are. Let well alone and be thankful that it is your wife and not yourself that has died first."

The acting of this piece affords unbounded amusement to any audience that witnesses it. The fanning of the grave, the sudden resurrection of Sir Serious, the consternation of the wife when she discovers that her lover has vanished, are all presented in such a ludicrous manner that the attention of the spectators is riveted upon the play as long as it lasts.

Play-actors in China have a hard life, but this is not entirely the fault of the public. Their dissolute habits are the real cause. On the stage the crowd sits in rapture at their feet. At one time they are in tears and by and by in fits of laughter as these men with their great talent for mimicry and with their powers of pathos touch the hearts of their audience. When the play is ended the charm has fled and the actor is once more the miserable character that his vices and his profession have made him. In consequence of the easy-going nature of the Chinese and their disregard for appearances he seems to take no care to preserve his dignity, for after the performance is over he descends from the stage and there, in the presence of the public, he disrobes himself of his magnificent dresses that have made him look like some famous hero or heroine and at once he becomes the meanest-looking man in all the crowd.

Here, for example, is a man who has been playing the character of a beautiful woman. She is letting down her long hair and taking off her silks and satins, and one by one removing her trinkets and her female ornaments. She then unbinds her feet and rubs the powder from her face and the rouge from her lips, and lo ! the heroine that has captivated all hearts by her grace and beauty is transformed into as vulgar-looking a ruffian as one would dislike to meet in the small hours of the night in some dark and lonely road. Close beside him is another who has been acting the part of a great mandarin. In his official dress and with his haughty



PLAYACTORS ACTING.

mien he was the object of profound respect, but now that he has taken off his gorgeous dresses in which he was performing his part, the charm and the dignity that these gave him have vanished and instead you have as commonplace and disreputable a man as you could pick out of the seedy-looking characters that abound in heathen life.

The end of these men is generally a very sad and a very miserable one. The opium habit which they have contracted is a deteriorating influence that strikes at the root of everything that is good or noble in life. It weakens the moral character and it makes a man so intensely selfish that he is prepared to ignore every human tie in his mad craving for the drug. At the best of times actors never dream of saving money, and as their powers of acting begin to fail, their earnings are seriously affected, but the pains and aches that the opium flashes through the body when the hour comes for it to be indulged in do not diminish with the waning income. By and by they drift lower, still pursued by the intolerable craving that never for a single day deserts them. Many of them become beggars or street musicians, and thus men who used to personate emperors and royal personages and famous heroes, and who used to hold the crowds spellbound, descend to the low position of sitting by the roadside and in piteous, whining tones imploring the passer-by to throw them a cash to keep them from starving.

CHAPTER XVII

A RAMBLE THROUGH A CHINESE CITY

A Chinese city gives one the impression that it was the last thing built, and there was so little room left for it that it had to be squeezed into the narrowest limits possible. Its main streets, where the largest traffic is to be found, are not usually more than ten or twelve feet wide and these are actually reduced to four or five by the tables and benches that the shopkeepers put on each side, on which they display their stock-in-trade.

The smaller streets are, of course, narrower, whilst the alleyways dwindle down to three or four feet. The houses are crowded together, and in order to meet the demands of the population each one is so built that it will accommodate several families if need be, and even then the dwellings are by no means large. A Chinese, however, is capable of being squeezed into as limited a space as any other human being in the world, and at the same time to have an air of freedom, as though he were living in a suite of rooms that he occupied entirely for his own use.

A foreigner, taking a ramble through a Chinese town, is greatly impressed with the fact that the people have no private family life—in our sense of the term. The shops have no windows, and as soon as the shutters are taken down in the morning the whole of the interior is open for the inspection of the public, who are privileged to see and to listen to all that is going on inside. Nobody seems to mind that. The conversation of the family or the loud cheapening of the goods are all conducted as though there was nobody within a hundred miles of them. It seems, indeed, as though the whole business of the place was carried on in the streets, and the affairs of everybody were common property.

A Chinese town has, on the whole, a mean, tumble-down-looking appearance. Even in the finest streets, where the commercial wealth of the place is centred, the shops are totally deficient in any architectural attractions. Whatever ability the Chinese may possess, it certainly does not lie in the direction of city-building. The modern builders seem to be under the grip of the dead hand of their ancestors. A new street, for example, is to be built. Designs are never asked for, and architects are never appealed to, because no such profession exists in this land. Plans that were drawn up when the world was young are ready to hand all around, and are so stereotyped on the brain of every builder in the land, that no room is left to them for invention. A street is burned down, and in a few days a hive of workmen is as busy as a colony of ants rebuilding. No alterations are made ; the same kind and size of beams are laid ; the same angles and corners spring up with an amazing fidelity to those that have vanished in the fire. With a beaver-like monotony, shops and houses are reproduced age after age after an identical pattern, and, consequently, a description of any particular town or district would stand as a model for all the others in the empire.

The narrow, crooked streets, the unsubstantial one-storied buildings, the badly paved roads, the poverty-stricken aspect of the poorer quarters, and the prevalence of the most horrible and disgusting smells, amongst the rich and the poor alike, are the features that most impress themselves upon the mind of the stranger, as he perambulates around in search of novelty.

But let us begin our stroll. Following the crowds that flow like a stream down the narrow arteries, we by and by come to an opening that leads into a square where a variety of life presents itself to our view. The whole of one side of it is occupied by a temple dedicated to the Goddess of Mercy. It shows how strong is the religious feeling of this particular district that the owners of property in this crowded business part, where the value of land must run high, should have been willing to surrender so large a space for the building of this temple. It is a very good specimen of the better class of shrines where the idols are worshipped. The goddess with her placid-looking face is placed right in the centre, where she can look out through the great open door upon the changing scenes of human life that move the livelong day before her. She is the most popular idol in China, and is worshipped by more people than any other throughout the empire. It is simply the belief in her goodness and pity that has led to this, for she is not a native goddess. Her home originally was in far-off India, and the story goes that she was the daughter of a king, and she was so touched by the miseries of the women who lived in the neighbourhood of her father's palace, that she made a solemn vow that she would never get married, but would dedicate her life to the service of her own sex. This she did, and when she died she was deified and her worship became a widespread one. The story of her devotion travelled over the Himalayas and across Turkestan into the fertile provinces of the north of China, and men were so touched with her self-denial that they said, "We must have her as our goddess too," and so, to-day, there is hardly a home amongst the four hundred millions of China that has not an image of this famous idol.

The open space in front of the temple is very largely occupied by itinerant dealers in various kinds of articles, who dot the square with their stalls, and with the free-and-easy way with which such men take liberties with the public roads, leave but scant space for the crowds that pass to and fro. Here is a seller of sweets, with a knot of little urchins crouching down around his basket, who, with glistening eyes and mouths that water are gazing upon the good things so temptingly displayed before them. Candied arbutus and Tientsin apples drowned in sugar, and peanuts fried in fat to a delicate brown, and square pieces of juicy-looking toffee, that make the mouth water to look at, can be bought at an amazingly low price. As far as sweets are concerned, China is a perfect fairyland for children, for what with peanut candy, juicy sugar-cane, candied fruit, and a host of unnameable products of the confectioner's art, they have a large and varied assortment of delights from which they may at any time solace themselves at an infinitesimal cost.

A few feet away from the seller of sweets is a fruit stand, where bananas from Canton, luscious-looking pineapples cut in delicate slices so as to tempt the thirsty, water-melons with black skins and crimson hearts, and mangoes with their green coats just turning yellow, the reflection of the ripe, golden fruit within, are daintily arranged to bewitch the passer-by and draw the cash out of his pocket.

Farther on is a man sitting on a stool in front of a low, round table, on which a solitary white glazed bowl is placed. A number of men are grouped around it, sitting on their heels, and watching with the fiercest gaze the man in charge throwing three or four dice into the basin. They are gamblers, as one can see at a glance, for their dull, heavy faces throb with passion, and their black eyes gleam with ill-suppressed emotion. They are watching the dice as they fall, and with a glance as quick as lightning counting the spots upon their upturned faces. The game is a most absorbing one. The dice are thrown as rapidly as the man can fling them into the dish, and the gamblers are kept in a constant state of watching the numbers that turn up. The crouching group do not utter a sound, whilst the face of the operator is as calm and as stolid-looking as that of an Egyptian sphinx, and as expressionless as the features of the stone lions that guard the gates of the temple close by. His own pile is gradually growing, but neither he nor the silent figures in front of him give any sign that the varying fortunes of the game have quickened their pulses by a single beat.

Just beyond this group is an itinerant barber with the implements of his craft by his side. One of these is a diminutive bench with a nest of drawers built under it, which contain his razors, strops, hones, &c. Close by is another article that plays an important part in the business of the barber. This is a small stand for holding a brass basin filled with water, and immediately underneath is a little furnace, where a charcoal fire is kept just alive, so that it can be fanned into a red heat should its services be required. With the patience of his race he is waiting as calmly for the coming of a customer as though he were a man of assured income, quite independent of the public. From his easy manner, and calm, unruffled face, one would never dream that he was close up to the margin of his resources, and that but one step ahead would land him in debt.

Whilst we are standing looking at him and his interesting apparatus, a customer makes his appearance and without a word takes his place upon the narrow bench. The barber, as silent as the other, gets his razor out of one of the drawers, and with an old, broken fan brings back to life the smouldering embers in the furnace. The razor is a most primitive one, consisting of a piece of iron, rough-hewn, with an edge that is kept sharp only by constant applications to a diminutive hone. It does not cost more than twopence, and it seems utterly inadequate for the serious work before it, in the mass of stubbles that stand up with an angry, defiant air from the head of the man who sits so unconcernedly waiting for the barber to commence his operations. A minute or two pass by in stropping the razor, and by the time it has got the required edge a little mist of steam begins to rise from the surface of the water in the brass bowl. The process of shaving can now begin in earnest, and so the barber takes a cloth and dips it into the now boiling water. Wringing it slightly out, he rubs it gently and insinuatingly over every part of the head, excepting the crown, which is held sacred from the touch of the razor. This process is repeated several times, till the rebellious growth has lost its stubbornness, and with weak and trembling knees it appears ready to submit to its fate. The barber now rapidly seizes the razor, and after a few hasty sweeps on a small strop in the palm of his hand, with a graceful motion he begins his work. To our amazement the black forest falls as naturally as the ripe grain before the onward march of the scythe. No soap of any kind has been used, and yet the simple application of a very hot, damp cloth has been sufficient to enable the operator to go on with his shaving till the whole space around the crown has been relieved of its stubby growth, and the white skin of the newly-mown parts and the black, raven hair of the crown stand out in striking contrast with each other.

Shaving is a much more elaborate business in China than it is with us, for though there is no hair on the face to occupy the barber's time, the eyes and ears come within the range of his art, and demand even nicer and more artistic treatment than the head. It makes one tremble to see how he plays amongst the eyelashes, trimming them here and there, and turning down the eyelids and letting the sharp razor meander along the inside of them. What good can be effected by this mysterious proceeding we cannot possible conceive. It is the custom of the trade and must be obeyed even though it may bring inflamed eyes and possibly loss of sight. Rather perish the eyes of the whole nation than that a sacred relic of the past, started by some idiotic barber in ancient times, who had not the sense to know what he was doing, should be lost to the country. And now the operation has been performed and head and ears have all come within the touch of those gentle, deft hands of the barber. With a final massage on the spine and the queue neatly replaited, the customer rises and drops into the hands of the operator, as though it were a matter of no importance, the imposing sum of cash that in our money would be equivalent to about a penny.

But what is the crowd that is gathered immediately in front of the entrance to the temple where, in a dim religious light, sits the goddess looking out on the busy scene before her? As we draw near to the edge of it, and peer at the standing figures, we see a man sitting on a bench, with a dingy, dog-eared book in his hand, from which he professes to be reading. He is doing this in a slovenly, slipshod manner. He would seem, indeed, to have a contempt for his audience, for he makes no attempt at oratory. He speaks in the most matter-of-fact way. There is no passion in his voice, no flash in his eye, no subtle touch of inspiration about him, and yet he is holding his audience spellbound as he drawls out in the unmusical, mechanical Chinese tones the story he is telling.

He is a sharp, shrewd-looking man, but of a decidedly worldly type. There is nothing spiritual or visionary about his face. It is a hard-looking one, with lines that have been engraven on it by passion and evil forces that have swept over his heart and left traces of the storm behind. That he is dissipated one can see at a glance, for a leaden hue, stamped there by the subtle alchemy of opium, dyes his features. His eyes are quick and restless, as though he were on his guard against some secret foe. He is Bohemian to the very tips of his unwashed finger-nails, whilst his long, thin hands, as delicate as a woman's, thrust through the wide, slovenly sleeves of his dingy scholar's gown, show that he is one of those degenerate students who have fallen from their high ideals, and is now living as best he may by his wits. This man is the historian of the town, and the romancer and the transmitter of myths and fables of ancient days, a living novel that lets out a chapter of its story each day for the delight of the great unwashed. Without such men as this history would be untaught, and the heroes and statesmen of bygone centuries would long since have been buried in oblivion. But for this popular lecturer on the subject, the knowledge of the past would be lost to the masses, whereas now the story of the famous men who have built up this empire is as household words in every family in the land.

He is evidently popular, for the crowd is great and their attention is fixed. Although he holds a book and professes to be reading from it, he evidently does not confine himself to the text. In the more stirring parts, he allows his imagination to take a flight, and in graphic, picturesque language pictures the hero he is describing. This happens to be Kung Ming,[1] a famous warrior who lived in the period of the "Three Kingdoms," and has ever since been the model of daring and scientific fighting, and the ideal knight, who spent his life in the service of his country. This story is never heard without warming the sluggish blood of this unwarlike people, and causing the eyes of the young fellows to flash, turning them for the moment into impromptu soldiers, ready to dash off and fight the enemies of China. The Chinese, like all Orientals, have a passion for stories, and as their memories are good the narratives they hear from these men are never forgotten, but are told again in the home, when some one more eloquent than the rest will while away the time by relating the marvellous adventures or doings of men who have been famous in the past.

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[1] For an account of this popular hero see Macgowan's Imperial History of China, Chapter on "The Three Kingdoms."

Leaving this crowded square with its busy typical life, we again enter the human stream that flows on as steadily as ever, and we pass by silk-shops, where the treasures of Canton and Soochow are stored, and curio-shops, where people of an antiquarian turn of mind may have their passion for old vases, ancient coins, and antique carving gratified to the utmost. Farther on there are shoe-shops, with shelves stored with all the different fashions, and country customers, with open mouths and with the air of the fields upon them, beguiled by these Crispins into giving more for their purchases than they ought to do.

As we move along we are impressed with the easy good-nature of every one. The street is cramped and the people so close to each other that it would seem as though they had studied a conjuring art to know how to avoid touching each other. When it is remembered that sedan-chairs and heavy goods that take up most of the available roadway have to travel along it, amongst these crowded passengers, the difference between the tempers of the East and the West will at once be realised. The utmost good temper is shown by every one, and inconveniences that would ruffle the temper of an Englishman do not raise the shadow of a frown upon the face of any one.

At a turn in the road we come upon a man sitting by a long, low table on which a variety of articles are exhibited. We discover by his signboard that he is a doctor, and that he professes to be qualified to deal with any disease, internal or external, that he may be called upon to treat. He does not seem oppressed with the responsibility that this involves, for when we ask him if he is really competent to do all this, he blandly smiles as though amused at our simplicity, and with a graceful though haughty inclination of the head he assures us that he is prepared to tackle any disease under the sun and to give it at least a heavy fall.

The appearance of the man raises some doubts in our mind regarding him. As to his general intelligence we have no misgiving. The mouth is firm set, indicating a strong purpose. His features show that he is a man who has been accustomed to think, whilst his eyes are bright and flashing, as though hidden fires were sending their sparks through them to the outer world. Our suspicions are aroused by his glibness, that reminds us more of the quack than the really able physician. His clothes, too, are not such as a man of his distinguished attainment ought to wear. They are greasy-looking and dilapidated. The days of their youth are far away in the past, and patches here and rents there show the straits to which they have been put to retain their integrity.

As we look over the articles spread out on the table we discover that he is a dentist as well as a doctor. We are interested, and we look once more at the man who professes so much. Right in front of us is a small heap of teeth, not manufactured by any cunning workman, but by the subtle alchemy of Nature. They are of all sizes and conditions. There are huge molars that have done yeoman service in the past, and eye-teeth, strong and determined-looking and worn, as though they had failed in the battle of life, and had come here to end their days. They were all marked and discoloured with the signs and symbols of the wear and tear they had gone through. They were a gruesome sight to look upon and I wondered much how such a curious collection could have been gathered together.

" Where did you get these from? " I asked the doctor, pointing to the heap, which, however, I was careful not to touch.

" Oh! I bought them," he replied, with just a touch of surprise on his face that he should be asked such a useless question. " When a man has to part with a tooth," he continued, " he does not throw it away. He brings it to me, and I buy it for a few cash, for he knows that in my profession it will come in handy some time or other."

Just as he was speaking a patient came up to him. On being asked what he wanted, he replied simply by opening his mouth to the very widest extent. It was a huge cavern and reminded one of the entrance to the Thames Tunnel. It was seen that his four upper front teeth were wanting, having been knocked out by a fall from a wall, and he was anxious to know if the doctor could supply their places with new ones.

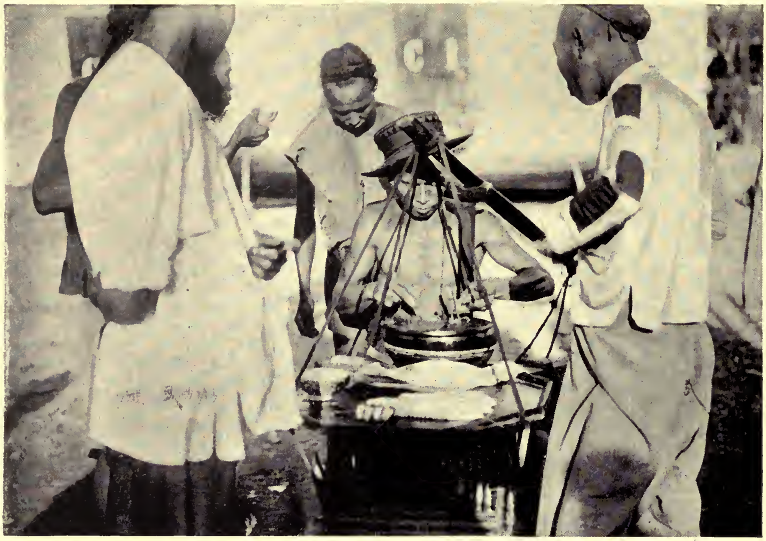
"Of course I can," he promptly replied, and measuring the cavity in the jaw, he carefully and with practised eye selected from the heap the four teeth that would exactly fill it. He then drilled a hole in them longitudinally and inserted a bit of coarse iron wire to bind them to each other. The ends of the wire were next inserted in holes that were carefully drilled into the teeth on each side of the cavity, and at once the chasm disappeared, and the crowd that had been looking on with critical eyes declared that his mouth looked as natural as though the new ones were those with which Nature had originally supplied him.

Leaving this greasy charlatan with his inodorous stock-in-trade, we again join the grand procession of human life that moves along as though impelled by some decree of fate. Beggars by the wayside try to move our compassion by bestowing upon us high mandarin titles and appointments under Government that would bring us unbounded wealth. Scholars and merchants, and coolies with bare feet and clad in patched and torn dull blue cotton cloth, move along by our side, or jostle us as the crowd thickens where the roads converge. As we saunter along amongst the busy crowd, getting new impressions of Chinese life from the varied faces that we meet with, we come upon a narrow nook, just off the main line of traffic. Our attention is arrested by a man who is seated at a small table, on which are laid conspicuously a Chinese inkstone and a pen ready for immediate use. He is about fifty years old, with a semi-scholarly, semi-shopman air about him. We recognise him at once as a public letter-writer. The great mass of the people can neither read nor write. There are countless homes where not a single member can do either, and they have to depend on such men as this when they wish to correspond with their friends.

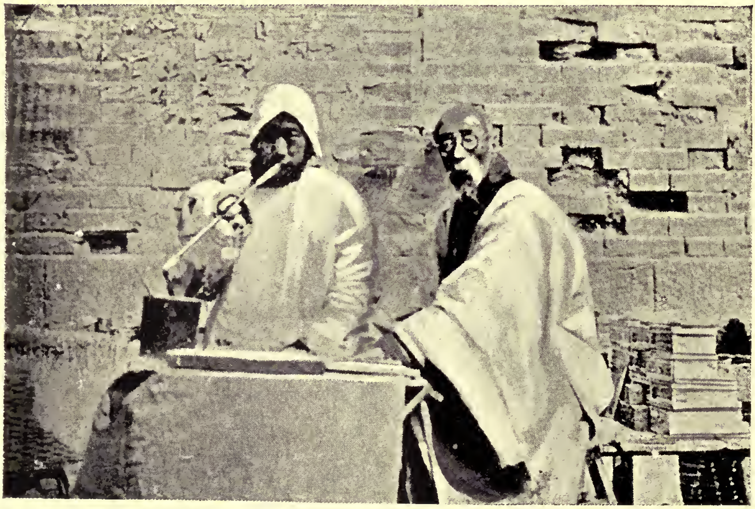
He is sitting and waiting with all the patience that is characteristic of his countrymen. One would never dream that his very livelihood depends upon the number of his customers. He is as calm and unconcerned-looking as though he had a private fortune of his own, and cared not whether he was employed or not. Whilst we are standing looking at him, a woman steps out of the crowd, and comes up to the table with a sheet of paper in her hand. She is between forty and fifty years of age and belongs to the humbler classes. This is quite evident by her presence there on the street, for a woman, even of the middle class, would never dream of coming out alone as she has done. She has large, unbound feet too, which means that in an early period of her life she was a slave, but in some way or other she has obtained her freedom and is now her own mistress.

Her face is a pleasant and kindly one, and as she stands and tells her story we feel that the human heart is the same in China that it is in England, and that it beats to the same tune and the same music in this far-off land as it does in the West. She tells, at first in stammering, hesitating language, how her son has gone abroad, and that for a whole year she has heard nothing from him. As she says this, there is a break in her voice and her eyes become full of tears. " He was always a good son," she continued, " and he left me simply because we were so poor. He was an industrious, hard-working lad, but he earned so little that we had scarcely enough to eat. One day a man who had been abroad told him of the high wages he could earn in Singapore, and how steady young men were always sure of employment there. The news filled his heart with hope, and he pleaded with me to let him go. For a long time I withheld my consent, for I did not wish to part with him as I was afraid that something might happen to him in that far-off land. He might get ill or he might die, and I should never see him again. But he was very determined, and finding his mind was so set upon going, I at last reluctantly yielded to his entreaties and he left me.

" That was five years ago," she said, " and every year till the present he has sent me home all the money he could spare out of his earnings. This year all letters have ceased, and I can get no tidings of him, so my heart is breaking for fear lest he may be dead," and here her tears begin to flow down her



AN ITINERANT COOK.



A LETTER-WRITER.
The man on the right is the Scribe.

To face p. 227.

cheeks, and sobs to check her utterance. It is a most pathetic scene. Several people who have stopped with Chinese familiarity to listen to her story are full of sympathy, and in order to ease her mind they invent the fable that her son is in the most perfect health and that he is doing well and prospering in Singapore. They assure her that the only reason why she has not received letters and money is because of the dishonesty of the people to whom they were entrusted. They knew this for a fact and they told her to dry her tears and take heart, for before long she would receive tidings that would fill her heart with joy. All these statements were, of course, pure fiction, but as the Chinese mind does not look upon truth as we do, it was considered a highly meritorious act pleasantly to deceive her for her own comfort with a plausible story that had no foundation in fact.

The face of the letter-writer was a perfect study whilst this little scene was being enacted. He sat with a calm and unimpassioned look, as though he were a judge listening to the pleading of counsel. He made no attempt to check the eloquence of the woman, or to suggest that a briefer description of her case would be more satisfactory and take up less of his time. To enable him to write a letter that would embody her ideas, he must listen to her patiently, and let her tell her story in her own way. He must also not interrupt the fiction of the bystanders. The Oriental delights in the picturesque, and all the lights and shadows that can be thrown upon the subject are considered as so many touches that help to bring out the prominent figure in the picture.

After every one has had his say, and the tragedy of this woman's life has been discussed from all points by the group before him, the writer suddenly grasps his pen, and in flowery language and in phrases culled from the writings of the sages, he has soon filled the paper she has given him with her loving wishes to her son and her entreaties to him to write to her as soon as possible and let her know how he is. Having read it over to her and folded and addressed it, he receives for all his trouble a small pile of cash equal in value to about a halfpenny of English money.

We once more mingle with the throng, and drift along with the human tide. In spite of filth and smells and unsavoury surroundings, there is a fascination about the scenes one sees in these narrow, ill-kept streets. There are types of life that one never dreams of in the West, and strange manners that are the outcome of a civilisation and thought that are the product of this luxuriant East. Among the motley crowd there are farmers carrying the produce of their farms on bamboo poles resting on their shoulders, Buddhist priests with shaven heads and unwashed gowns, and peddlers, conjurers, and loafing-looking ruffians upon whose faces are written theft and violence when darkness has settled upon the unlighted city. One could easily fancy oneself to be in a huge fair, where every class had been gathered either for pleasure or for business. It would seem, indeed, as though the idea of amusement were the uppermost one, and that jokers and mountebanks were in the predominance, for somehow or other most of the faces one sees suggest the comical and cause us to smile, although we could hardly tell the reason why.

As we are idly moving on, we come to an open space in front of a small temple, and in a moment our thoughts are carried away, in a flash, to the far-off West, for there, right before us, is a Punch and Judy show. There is nothing that we have seen that excites so warm an interest in our hearts as this. It is the one sole bit of the Occident that has strayed into the midst of this strange, old-world, old-fashioned life, and it seems as though it had brought with it a whiff that was fragrant with the thoughts and memories of the homeland.

The show seems to be an exact reproduction of the one that so charmed us and made our sides split with laughter when we were young, only the figures are Chinese, and the language the harsh, mechanical sounds of the country, and there is no dog. The conduct of the play is about the same. The man inside the curtain controls with equal perfection the various figures as they are hoisted up before the audience, and the loud falsetto voices of men engaged in an angry contest of words, and the sounds of people in ordinary conversation, are reproduced to the very life.

The one question that perplexes us is, how it is that two sets of civilisation, as wide as the poles from each other, could have independently devised such a grotesque and humorous form of amusement as Punch and Judy. We have absolutely no answer to give to this. After a time we tear ourselves away regretfully from the show, and as we lose ourselves once more amongst the throng, we catch the high screaming notes of Punch, as they follow us over the heads of the people, some time after we have lost sight of the play.

We have not proceeded far when our ear catches a sound in the distance of brazen gongs struck sharply and with emphasis, whilst at the same time there are notes of human voices, pitched in a high key, that come lingering and trailing through the air, as though those who uttered them were unwilling to part with them, and held on to them as long as breath would allow. These are warnings that a mandarin is coming, and that every one must hasten to get out of his way, under pain of incurring his severe anger and displeasure. The leisurely Oriental air of the moving crowds is at once exchanged for an Occidental one. Some rush forward to get far in advance in order to make their escape round the first turning. Others make a dash for the sides of the road, where they flatten themselves as flat as pancakes, whilst with hands drooping by their sides, and queues hanging reverently down their backs, they assume a posture of humility as the great man passes.

By this time the centre of the road is absolutely empty, and the head of the mandarin procession looms in view. First come the men with gongs, which they occasionally clang for the benefit of the crowds ahead. Next to them are the "shouters," whose crescendo notes come between the intervals of the gong-beating. These are clad in long dresses that come to their ankles. On their heads they have tall hats in the shape of a candle-extinguisher, which they cock on one side. This gives them a most comical appearance, and yet, strange to say, the Chinese see nothing funny in it. In their hands they carry whips ready poised for action, and keen glances are cast to the right and to the left to see if there is not some delinquent upon whom they may practise their calling. A shade of disappointment seems to cloud their faces, because every one is so good that they have no excuse for slashing at them. Behind these shouters walk a few men with chains in their hands, ready to bind any unfortunate who may incur the wrath of the mandarin. These men are most villainous and disreputable-looking, with clothes so dirty that it is beyond the power of soap or carbolic to cleanse them. Closely following these comes the official, seated in his sedan-chair, borne by eight bearers. He is a beau-ideal specimen of the genus mandarin, being stout, capacious, and with an air of haughtiness and pride. The typical mandarin is never thin. Why should he be so? He is ever busy in the pleasant occupation of scooping in the dollars and of fleecing his people. He has a delightfully easy conscience, his wealth is growing, and he lives upon the fat of the land.

His face is not an attractive one to look upon. It is broad and expansive, but it is cold and haughty. If he sees the crowds that flatten themselves up against the shops he gives no sign that he does so. No smile thaws the winter of his features, and no kindly sympathies soften the stony look in his eyes. He might be a water-buffalo carried in state, so untouched does he seem to be by any human passion or feeling. A great deal of this is, no doubt, put on. A rigid deportment and a cold, disdainful air are supposed to be essential in a ruler, for in private where I have met some of these gentry I have found them to be as genial and as full of laughter and mirth as any of the common people on whom the cares of state have never sat. The procession passes on with a swing, and the yellow-faced, perspiring crowds, with a sigh of relief, glide into the vacant roadway, and the stream rolls on as before.

As we wind our way amidst the ebb and flow of this Chinese human life, we are struck with the fact that there must be a good deal of poverty amongst the people generally—that is, if we are to judge by the people we meet on the streets. Their clothes are made of the commonest materials, and even these are not well kept. They are greasy and frowsy-looking, and have the appearance of having never seen soap and water since they were first made in the remote past. The result is that the people, as a whole, are sadly wanting in picturesqueness, and the general absence of women renders this all the more conspicuous.

As we are sauntering along, gazing at the strange faces that here and there attract our attention, and at the funny-looking signboards that the tradesmen hang out in front of their shops, we find our progress impeded by a crowd that has gathered in front of a large idol-shop. The gods within seem unconcerned and sit with placid-looking faces on the shelves as though the unusual numbers that are blocking up the street were a matter of everyday occurrence. We press forward and find that the stoppage is caused by a quarrel between two men. They are both highly excited, and it seems as though a fight is imminent. Their faces are inflamed with passion, and they gesticulate violently and point with their outstretched hands at each other, whilst the language to sting and enrage one another is strong and sulphurous. We notice, however, that there is no clenching of fists by either of them, as there would have been by two infuriated Englishmen. In addition to the vilest and most disgusting language that they hurl at each other, they seem to rely upon one particular gesture as the choicest in the whole armoury of their attack, and that is the thrusting of their middle finger as near the faces of their opponents as they can safely get. There is nothing in the whole range of Chinese insult that surpasses this as an expression of deadly hate and contempt. The men seem as though they have been struck with a whip whenever the long, thin finger, standing out distinctly from the rest, is darted, rapier-like, at their faces. In spite, however, of the apparently deadly nature of the enmity that exists between them, there seems to be no fight in either of them. I soon perceived that when each man made his rush at the other, it was just at the precise time when he knew that a number of men about him would dart out upon him and drag him back beyond the reach of his enemy. The whole thing by and by became positively ludicrous, and though the men were really in a tremendous passion, the scene had all the effect upon me of a wild burlesque that had been got up to break the everlasting monotony of Chinese life.

All this time no policeman had appeared upon the scene, for the very sufficient reason that such an official is not to be found in the whole town. The fact is the preservation of the peace is left in the hands of the people, unpaid, and yet still held responsible for any serious disturbance that may take place in any part of the town. After a time the shopkeepers, thinking the whole thing a nuisance, ordered off the two disturbers of the peace, with an intimation that they would make it hot for them if they did not go. Angry and sullen, and breathing out maledictions, they went off in different directions, and the traffic of the street resumed its usual course.

There is one very noticeable feature in these streets, and that is the dogs. Every family makes it a point of having one for police purposes to protect itself from thieves during the silent hours of the night, for there is no other force that can be depended upon as can these animals. The Chinese dog has little to commend it beyond its intense fidelity to the family to which it belongs. It is a common, mangy-looking cur with not a single element of beauty about it. It is full of life and spirit, and it is pugnacious in every fibre of its being. The sound of battle is sweet music to it, and will send it hurrying headlong, with open mouth and short, sharp yelps, in its direction to join the fray.

It is most amusing to observe the way in which dog-life manifests itself in any street along which one may pass. The dogs have evidently a system of laws for the preservation of their rights, which they guard as jealously as any body of men do theirs. Every animal, for example, seems to have the belief that a certain space in front of its master's door belongs to it. Should a stray dog make an incursion upon it, without its consent, a furious assault is at once made upon it, not only by the assumed owner of the land, but also by the dogs on both sides of it. Now these animals are perfectly willing to let all and every

Chinese human being pass without restriction, but the moment a foreigner is seen, war to the knife is at once declared. Some ugly brute catches sight of him. With short, angry barks, and snarling lips that turn up with such withering scorn that his white, gleaming teeth are all exposed, he dogs his footsteps. The sounds are heard by the brutes ahead, and instantly they are on the alert to worry him when he appears on their ground. Were it not for the conservative principle that keeps these animals within their own domains, the foreigner would often run the risk of being severely injured.

As we continue our walk through the streets, a feeling of monotony begins to creep over us. Everything is so common-looking and stereotyped. There are no surprises in a Chinese town. High art has had no hand in constructing it, and Nature has been severely thrust out of it. The shops are all built to the same inartistic pattern. A wide opening, closed at night by shutters and by day revealing the contents and in many cases the family life of the inmates, is the only sign of the design of the builder. The next door is the same, and the next and the next, and so on through countless streets and alleyways, the same primitive conception that their fathers had two thousand years ago. No trees are seen in the streets. The slabs of roughly-hewn granite stone are flung across it with no artistic taste, and no design but that of severe utility. The ceaseless tread of countless feet has worn these down unevenly, and miniature ponds and lakes collect here in wet weather. The drains that run below get foul and choked, and through their open seams exude black slime saturated with smells and odours that taint the air.

No touch of Nature is seen anywhere, and no colours painted by her hand relieve the dreary, dusty work of man. The spring comes round, but there is no blossoming of flowers or buds along these narrow arteries, where the feet of men would crush them in the dust. Summer succeeds, and outside the fields and the hills are crowned with living beauty, but the streets seem to grow more dusty and dreary than ever. The autumn, laden with harvests and luscious fruits, comes with generous hands to gladden men's hearts, but it can find no place in these cramped, unsavoury, inartistic roads. Winter follows, but the only sign is that it is cooler, and the great mad sun has lost his power to scorch. There are no falling leaves, and trees naked and bare, silent prophecies of the new life that the coming spring will bring. The streets are the same all the year round. There men are crowded so close to each other that there seems no place to breathe. There cholera and plague and fevers run riot, and there the great human heart bears the tragedies of life, and with a heroism that is pathetic strives to make the best of a life from which romance and poetry have been driven out.

The one redeeming feature about this concentrated mass of uncleanliness and squalor and discomfort is the people themselves. Somehow or other there is an attraction about them that never loses its power. It is not because they are beautiful, for the masses are exceedingly plain and unattractive. They are unrefined, too, and often very exasperating in their manners. In spite of all this there is a something about these inartistic, rough-hewn faces that draws us to them, and we forget the ugliness of the features in the easy good-nature, the broad grin that illumines the face at the least sign of humour, and the large fund of genuine human feeling that they undoubtedly possess.

CHAPTER XVIII

RIVER LIFE IN CHINA

THE rivers of China have in all ages been the great means by which it has been possible to carry on the traffic of this extensive country. As shown in the chapter on "Highways and Byways," the Chinese, like all Oriental nations, have never, in any large sense, been road-makers. It is true that on the great trade routes, along which the products of the various provinces have been carried from one to another, a serious attempt has often been made, both by the Government and the people, to construct roads that would facilitate the passage of the merchandise in the long journeys that were made from the Yellow Sea in the east to the far-off province of Szechuan in the west.

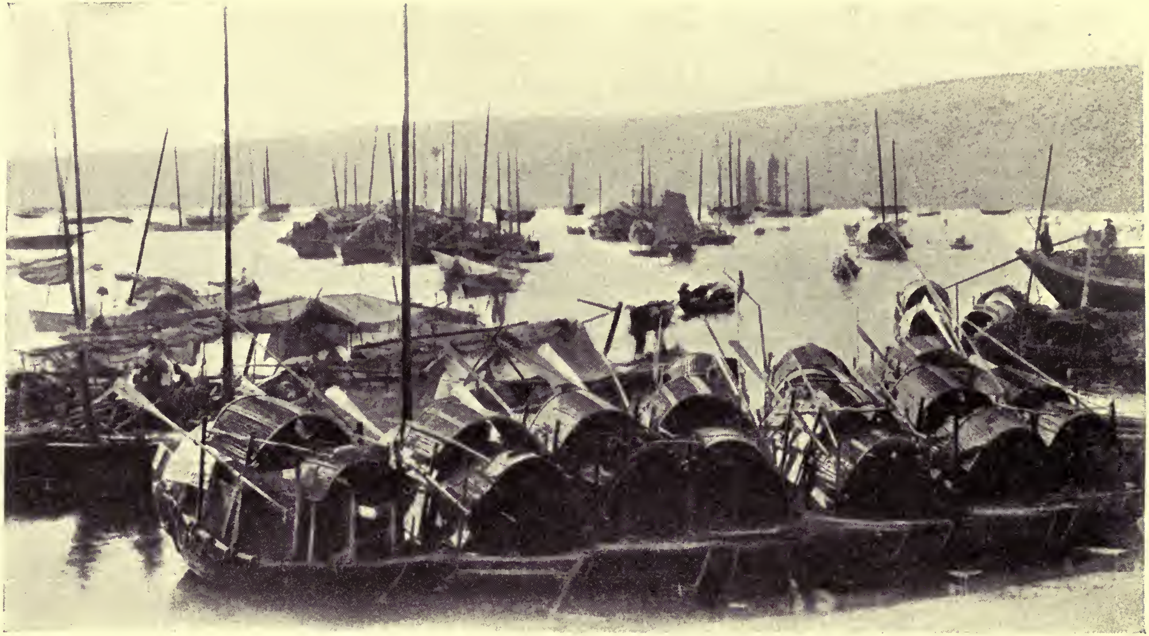
It was not the love of making roads, however, that led to the construction of these, but sheer and absolute necessity. That this was really so is proved by the fact that the upkeep of these thoroughfares was always most uncertain and most unsatisfactory. There was no system for their maintenance and repair, and no regularly appointed officials to see that they were kept from falling into ruins. A bridge, for example, for some time would show signs of weakness. The slabs of stone that formed the roadway would become uneven, so that foot passengers would find it troublesome to pick their way across it, whilst coolies with heavy burdens would pant and groan as they stumbled over the rugged surface, fearful lest they should fall and hurt themselves against the uptilted corners of the huge slabs. Nothing, however, would be done, simply because there was no one to see about it, until finally when the danger became so pressing that it seemed as though the bridge would collapse some influential person in the neighbourhood would collect subscriptions and have it repaired.

If this were the case with the great roads, where the traffic was incessant and along which mandarins and Government officials and packhorses with sore backs and huge burdens, as well as the constant and never-ending stream of foot passengers, travelled from early dawn till the deepening twilight filled them with shadows, much more so was it with the countless cross-roads that like an immense net intersected the country. These were left very much to Nature to grapple with, and though she did her best with grasses and with wild flowers and other artistic methods, she could never succeed in making them strong and serviceable and fit to bear the strain of the rain-storms that often burst like a deluge over this land, or to endure the incessant wear and tear of the patient feet that, the whole year round, tread them in the long and weary journeys that they have to make throughout the empire.

Now, fortunately for the toilers of this land—and these constitute the overwhelming majority of the entire population—the country is covered with great rivers and noble lakes and streams innumerable, that flow with a never-ending song from the lofty mountains that stand as sentinels on the borderland of the empire, and that abound in nearly every one of the eighteen provinces that make up the vast area of this beautiful country.

These lakes, streams, and mighty rivers that flow as with the march of a conqueror to the ocean have sent their tributaries far and wide into every opening and nook and cranny where Nature would give them permission to flow, to cover the land with great forests, and luxuriant harvests, and flowers so varied and abundant that they have actually given a name to China, and the wide world over it is known as "The Flowery Kingdom."

But besides this beneficent purpose these rivers and streams have fulfilled in some respects a no less important one, viz., the bringing into touch with each other the remote and distant regions of the country that without them would be as far removed from one another as though they belonged to different continents.



SAN-PANS AND JUNKS.

To face p. 237.

The magnificent River Yangtze, the "Son of the Ocean," that runs right across the centre of the country, is an example of what I mean. The entrance to this mighty stream is a veritable sea, where no banks can be seen to mark its boundaries, but where its waters, yellow with the sands that have drifted down with it from the interior, are now broken into murmuring ripples by the passing breeze, and anon turned into wild and maddened waves by the fierce blasts of the typhoon. Great ocean-going steamers can travel up it for six hundred miles, and still beyond, for more than fifteen hundred, the broad stream flows through some of the richest provinces of the empire. Along this from the earliest days the traffic of the East has been carried on with the West, and huge unwieldy junks and sailing-boats of a thousand different patterns and construction force their way against the ever-ebbing tide of this son of the ocean up great stretches where no banks on either side can be seen, and through gorges where the mountains, envious of the river, have invaded its domain and left but a few hundred yards through which it can hurl its waters in a fierce and mighty onrush to the sea. On they go to the far-off goal in the west, with great plains stretching on both sides into the horizon, and up great waterfalls where they have to be dragged by hundreds of sturdy arms through black and cruel rocks over which the stream ever breaks with an angry roar, and where the breaking of a rope would mean the instant wrecking of the boat and the destruction of all on board. Still day after day and week after week, with the steady patience of the indomitable Chinese, the boats travel on amongst people speaking languages different from the ports from which they started, and through regions marked by great luxuriance of natural wealth, and at others by a wild and desert look, they at last cast anchor two thousand miles away from home in the far-off harbour in the west.

The Yellow River is another example of the beneficent and civilising influences of these mighty streams that act as the highways along which the various products of differing regions are carried to each other, and over whose surface glide thousands of boats and junks of all shapes and sizes, with countless passengers every year to penetrate into territories that, but for them, would be lands undiscovered and unknown to the distant parts of the empire.

This river is the most famous in China, for it has been the most deeply associated with the life of the nation. The very earliest settlers in their travels eastward made their first encampments on its banks, and from there started the great empire that has spread far beyond into regions where its name is but a sound and a tradition.

Along its shores many of the greatest events in ancient times that come to us with an air of mystery about them because of their antiquity were transacted by the sages and heroes that helped to make Chinese history. It is a river that may be well proud of its traditions, for it has always been associated with the great men and the most stirring events in the life of the Chinese. Not far from its banks were born the men whose names are known the wide world over.

Dynasty after dynasty rose and flourished and passed away within sight of its waters. Its memory is enshrined and preserved in the sacred books of the country, and civilisation grew and literature sprang up and flourished almost within the sound of its mighty waters.

It has not always been a kindly and beneficent force, for to-day one of the names by which it is widely known is "China's Sorrow." Wild fits of madness at times come over it, and then it is a fury that spares neither man, woman, nor child. When the great mountains beyond send down their floods and the rains in springtime descend in sheets as though the very flood-gates of the sky were flung wide open, then the river, filled up to the very brim, becomes a ruthless demon, and in its hatred of restraint bursts its banks, races madly across the plains, and tears down villages and submerges walled cities and drowns their peoples, leaving a sea where once the landscape was dotted with thousands of towns and villages.

The Son of the Ocean and the Yellow River are the two great streams of China, but there are countless others that but for them would be deemed worthy of no mean place amongst the waterways of the country. China is positively rich in such, and its people, conscious of their value, have given free rein to their inventive genius and devised myriad shapes and plans of boats to suit the particular kind of river or streamlet along which they are meant to travel. It will be apparent from this that the proportion of people that spend their lives in boats in this wonderful land is very considerable. I do not refer simply to those who are passengers, and who, after they have reached their destination, take up their abode on shore, but to those who are permanent dwellers on the waters. There are large populations that are born and reared on it, who marry in these boats and bring up families in them, and who finally breathe their last within them. If the Chinese were not an exceedingly patient, long-enduring people, and tolerant of discomfort such as would make an Englishman mad and disgusted with life, boat-life would become so intolerable that men would refuse to endure it.

But let me describe one of these floating homes and take a trip of a few weeks in her, when we shall get a glimpse into the way in which large numbers of people spend their lives, and with good-nature and content perform what would be to us the most irksome of duties. The boat I refer to is one built for the passenger trade and is about twenty-four feet long and six feet wide. In the centre is a cabin ten feet long, where the passengers live, and cut off from this by a wooden partition with a sliding door in it is a narrow compartment, three feet in width, in which a male servant, if any, and sundry small articles of luggage may be accommodated.

Beyond this small room is a clear space of eight feet that reaches to the stern of the boat. On this and in a hold, some two feet deep that lies beneath the deck, provision has been made for steering, rowing, cooking, and sleeping of the captain and his crew. At the bow there is a vacant space of five feet where some of the men stand and row in case of calm or head winds, and where they hoist or lower the sails as the need may be.

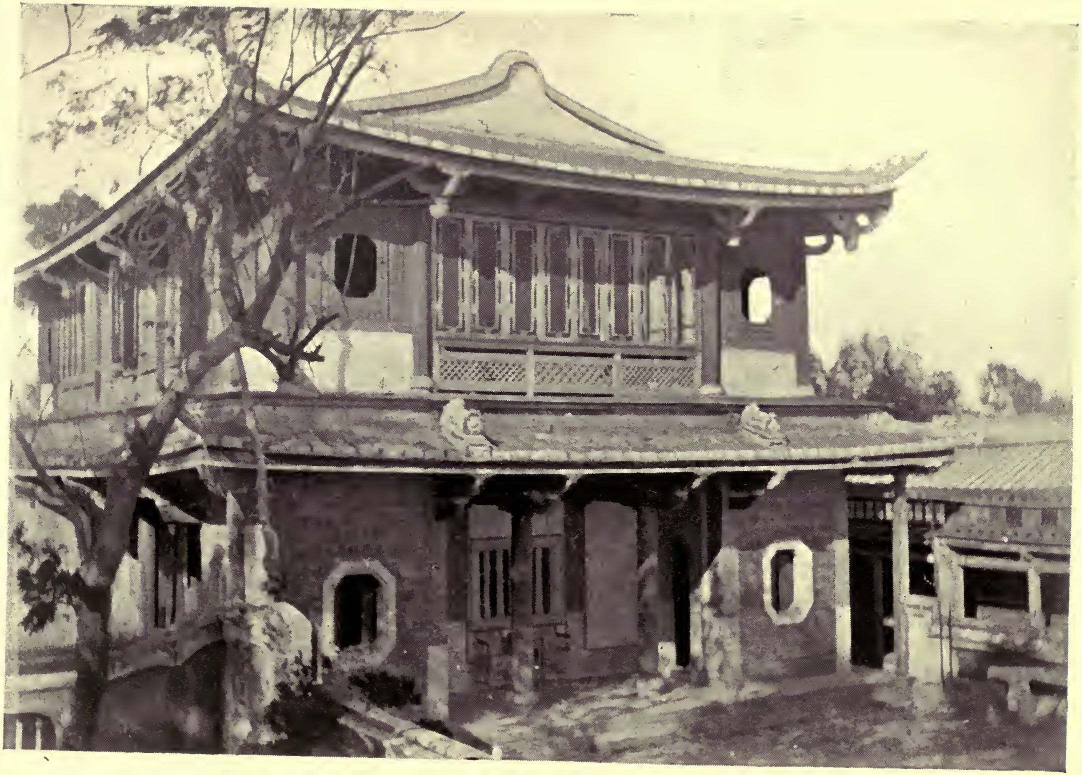
The most remarkable thing in the economy of this boat is the very limited space into which the crew of six sturdy fellows are content to be cramped as long as the voyage may last. The wonder, indeed, is, however are they to be accommodated? where are they to sit when they are not at work? where will they eat, and, most important of all, where are they to sleep?

Whilst the boat is in motion the problem seems less difficult to solve, for half of the men are in the bow poling or rowing, whilst the rest are engaged in the same operations in the stern. It is when they rest for meals or when the boat is anchored for the night that the true genius of the Chinese for adapting himself to the most uncomfortable of positions comes out.

There is absolutely nothing for him to sit upon but the boards of the deck, and no space in which he can stretch his legs. It would seem, indeed, as though the Chinese had studied these latter and knew exactly how to dispose of them in the smallest possible space. His ideal seems, indeed, to have been a carpenter's rule that can be folded up. When he sits down he doubles them up very much like that, with his knees verging towards his body, retaining them in their constrained position by keeping his arms tightly entwined around them.

Five minutes of this would weary an Englishman, but the Chinese sits there with as much content upon his face as though he had at last attained the ideal posture where supreme comfort was to be enjoyed. He will continue in this same position for any length of time, without any apparent weariness or need of change. When it is nearly mealtime one of the number is detailed to act as cook. The first thing he does is to take off what seems to be the lid of a box about a foot and a half square that lies unconsidered on the deck. It is now discovered to be a miniature kitchen, with a small furnace and rice-pan all ready for cooking either the simple meal of these boatmen or the more elaborate one demanded by the passengers.

When everything is ready and a huge jar of smoking rice is placed on the middle of the deck, with bowls and chopsticks arranged temptingly around it, the call shouted out "Come, eat!" brings the men trooping aft, where they arrange themselves in a circle around



A GENTLEMAN'S COUNTRY HOUSE.

the jar. The first position they all naturally adopt is the popular one of sitting on their heels, but as they proceed with the meal some, tired with this grotesque attitude, sit on the deck with their legs cocked up carpenter-rule-like in a perpendicular form. This is the only alternative pose they can take, for there is no room to stretch them out, but with the cuteness of the Celestial they proceed at once to utilise them for immediate use. At one moment they are used as a rest for the weary arm that holds the bowlful of rice, whilst at another they act as an impromptu table on which they can place their arms when the necessities of conversation cause them to stay the shovelling of rice down their throats.

Looking at the merry group before one and the natural and easy-looking pose that each one has assumed, one would never dream that the posture they have adopted is one of the most tiring and uncomfortable it is possible to imagine. They seem, indeed, to be in the very height of bliss, and smiles wreathe their faces and jokes fly round the circle till the great jar lies cold and empty, when each one having rinsed his rice-bowl and chopsticks in the flowing river and turned them upside down to dry on a secure corner of the deck, they return to their several duties.

The work goes on steadily now until sunset, when, having reached some recognised anchorage where boats usually anchor for the night, they take up a position close to numbers of others, who for the sake of mutual protection against robbers make their rendezvous at certain safe and well-protected places on the river. As they are doing this darkness seems to rise up out of the earth and from the bases of the hills as though a new force had come to defy the light. The shadows creep across the country, and with silent tread wind along the river and blot out the banks and the trees. The men gather once more around the smoking jar in the same intolerable and grotesque attitudes, not daring to stretch a foot lest they should knock over their evening meal. When that has been dispatched and the bowls washed in the water that ripples against the boat and sings its evening song the men light their pipes and sit up against the bulwarks, their legs still drawn up and their knees at right angles to their chins. The Chinese was never intended by Nature to lounge, or stretch himself on sofas, or indulge his wearied body in the simplest luxury. He knows better than to expect anything of that kind, and so he is content with what to us would be misery. By and by the men become drowsy, the day's work has been a toilsome one, and besides, to-morrow morning, in the dimmest of twilight, the anchor will be lifted and the boat will start on its onward journey. But where shall the men sleep? There is not the remotest sign of any place where they can be accommodated, yet wait a moment and the mystery will be solved. Two or three planks are taken up from the deck and a dark recess is revealed, where the bedroom lies concealed. It is about three feet deep, shelving up on each side to two. One by one the men gradually drop into the opening and disappear. It is a case of sardines in a tin, heads and heels so adjusted as to pack with the least loss of space.

The captain remains to the last and, with a loud yawn and a rapid look at the river and then at his boat to see that everything is all right, he slowly dives into a narrow opening in the bow that looks very like the mouth of a moderate-sized box, curls himself round in it like a snail in his shell, and in a moment his loud snores show that the scenes of this world have vanished from his gaze. It does not matter that during the livelong night he cannot stretch himself, or, indeed, change his position. The Chinese knows how to enjoy comfort as much as any one in the world, but let him be placed where the utmost discomfort is demanded from him, and he will adapt himself to his surroundings just as though he had been bred and born in them.

During the night the air grows cold, and a chill breeze blows along the river. Some one of the men in the sardine-tin below wakes with a shivery feeling. He rises and places the planks over the opening, and now the fine, brawny fellows are cut off from the air outside. In a few minutes it must be perfectly stifling and the air hot and vitiated in this limited space below. An Occidental would be tortured in this foul atmosphere, and would rise and madly dash away the planks that were bringing suffocation upon him. The Chinese sleeps as calmly and rises the next morning as refreshed as though every sanitary condition had been complied with.

The example given above belongs rather to what may be called the aristocracy of river life. Happy indeed would be the men and women who have to spend their days upon the water had they all such comparatively spacious castles as the one I have described in which to make their home. A very large section has to be content with much narrower quarters, and this applies especially to the poorer classes, who have to earn their daily bread and who have but a very slender capital with which to invest in a boat.

In my various journeys on the rivers, I have often been deeply interested in watching the home life of the poorer fishermen that throng the inland waters and streams where fish are to be caught. The evening draws nigh, and from far and near these tiny boats may be seen making their way to their nightly anchorage. They fasten up close to where mine is lying, so I can see every detail that goes on in them. They are usually about twelve feet in length and fashioned very much as the larger ones are. The centre is covered in with a strong mat-shed, as is also the stern where the steerer stands, and where the oars are worked when engaged in fishing. The bow is an open space from which the nets are cast and where the family take their recreation when they are not employed in their calling.

The family in the boat close by consists of a man and his wife, his grown-up son and his wife, and their two little children. They evidently do not consider themselves cramped, for, right at the end of the bow, a small pig is being reared that seems perfectly contented with its narrow quarters. The youngest child, who is just beginning to toddle about, evidently has a desire to go on exploring expeditions, for I notice that a string is fastened to one of his legs so that in case he should fall overboard he can at once be fished up and saved from drowning. Now, this family has never known any home but this. Twenty-five years ago the father brought his young bride home from another boat on which she had been reared, for no shore-bred girl would ever dream of consenting to be his wife. The boat has been renewed several times, but the home is the same. Children have been born to them and the girls have become the wives of fishermen. The only son remains to be the heir of the family and the one on whom its responsibilities will fall when the old people are carried to their long home on shore.

The fact that they have so little space in which to move about does not seem to trouble them at all. Whether standing or sitting, each one occupies the space only that stern necessity demands. When they are tired of standing, they gracefully subside on their heels. They are a cheery, contented people, full of human nature, and sociable in the extreme. I make a remark to the men and at once their faces beam, and they lay themselves out to be agreeable. The women, though at first more shy than their husbands, soon lose their restraint and chat and talk with us in the most friendly and unrestrained manner. In another boat that lay a little farther off I noticed a profound stillness ; all life seemed to have vanished from her. " What is the reason there is so little life on that boat? " I asked of my friends. In a whisper that could hardly be heard I was informed that the wife had died only a few hours before, and the husband, sorrow-stricken, was lying down heart-broken beside the one that death had carried off.

The Chinese are most expert boat-builders and have shown this in the way in which they have designed and built just the very kind of craft that is best adapted for the particular service required of it. One of the most interesting specimens to be met with on the rivers is the rapid boat. This has been constructed with a special view to the dangers that boats are liable to when shooting the rapids that sometimes exist in rivers in mountainous districts. It is a perfect masterpiece of invention, and carries its passengers and cargo with wonderful safety down the great shelving river that pours its waters over black rocks and against sharp projecting headlands with a rush and a roar to the plain, miles and miles away in the distance.

Its planks, instead of being stiff and massive, are lithe and supple, and so bound together that they yield and give as the boat meets the rush of waters or turns almost at right angles to avoid some threatening obstruction that lies in the very fairway of the river. One of the most conspicuous features about it is the huge oar that runs almost the entire length of the boat. Upon this the safety of the craft may be said to depend, for it acts not only as a rudder when the course is straight, but also as a powerful lever by which, with a single swing, it wrenches round the boat in some critical moment and saves it from being dashed upon the cruel rocks ahead.

A voyage down one of these rapids is a most exciting and thrilling experience. Every other thought that has absorbed the mind before vanishes at the sight of dangers that rise in quick succession in the mad rush down these magnificent gorges. The first sensation is one of absolute helplessness, for there is no turning back when once the boat has been fully caught in the grip of a current that knows no restraint. The men in charge of the boat are evidently impressed with the seriousness of the job they have in hand. The captain gazes with an intense look down the great avalanche of seething waters, whilst a man, who might be really called the pilot, stands at the extreme end of the bow with a long pole ready poised to act at a moment's notice.

There is extreme tension amongst both passengers and crew as the boat gains momentum, and the more timid amongst the former have a pale and nervous look that shows how much they are affected by the peril in which they believe themselves to be.

And, indeed, the circumstances are such as to induce a certain amount of awe. The river flows down with a mighty rush, whilst the pine-covered, precipitous banks of the lofty hills seems to be flying terror-stricken in the opposite direction. All at once a jagged-looking rock, around which the tide froths and foams, appears in the very line the boat is being steered. It is distinctly visible, and yet the captain keeps on his course, as though he did not see it. Every one holds his breath and trembles as he thinks of the crash and the instant destruction of the boat when it dashes on the rock that seems flying upstream to meet it. There would be a panic were it not that the captain stands like a carved statue, unmoved, with his black, piercing eyes fixed with an intensity of gaze upon the sinister object ahead. And still the boat moves on ; the banks seem to fly faster and the hills look on with silent terror at the catastrophe that is about to happen, when, just as she is within a few feet of the rock, the man in the bow swiftly darts out his pole and with strong thrust diverts her course. In an instant almost she is careering on in safety with the danger slowly disappearing astern.

Every one breathes a sigh of relief, the passengers' faces relax in smiles and even the captain lights his long bamboo pipe and draws a few whiffs from it, but all the time his eyes are fixed upon the stream. The danger is by no means over, for though the river is broad the pathway for the boats is narrow, and broken water and sudden jets of spray show that under the placid face of the swift-rushing torrent are rocks that would wreck any boat that touches them. An hour or so passes delightfully and the boat glides like a dream past banks that are covered with feathery bamboos, around headlands on which stately trees stand as sentinels, and by hamlets coyly showing their houses from the midst of pines and banyans. It is a very poem of travel, for the scenery is grand and the changes rapid, and there is besides the sense of rapid motion that has such an exhilarating effect on the mind.

All at once the dream is broken into and the danger of navigation is once more forced upon the minds of all. The captain once more stands alert with a stern and anxious look upon his face, whilst the bowman with pole in hand takes his place ready for the work that he will soon have to perform. A turn in the river reveals to us a sight that sends a tremor throbbing through our hearts. Scattered across the surface of the river is a perfect shoal of rocks that seem to bar all passage through them.

The stream just here is at its maddest, for this is one of the strongest of the many rapids down which the waters rush and roar in their passage to the plain at the foot of the mountains. There seems to be no passage through these black, cruel rocks against which the waters are being hurled. As we rush on we catch sight of the foam that encircles each, and imagine the roar of the breaking waters upon them. The profoundest silence reigns, and only the beating of one's heart is heard. As we come nearer we perceive a kind of opening between two of the large groups of rocks, but however is the boat to be so turned and manœuvred that we shall escape being dashed upon the lower ones?

The supreme moment has come when this is to be decided. When we are almost upon them the bowman thrusts out his long pole, the men who are handling the huge oar give it a mighty swing, and instantly the boat is turned as though on a pivot and, rushing through the narrow pathway, she emerges into safety. Once more we are flying down the rapids, and ere long we find ourselves in a long and even reach where the current is less strong.

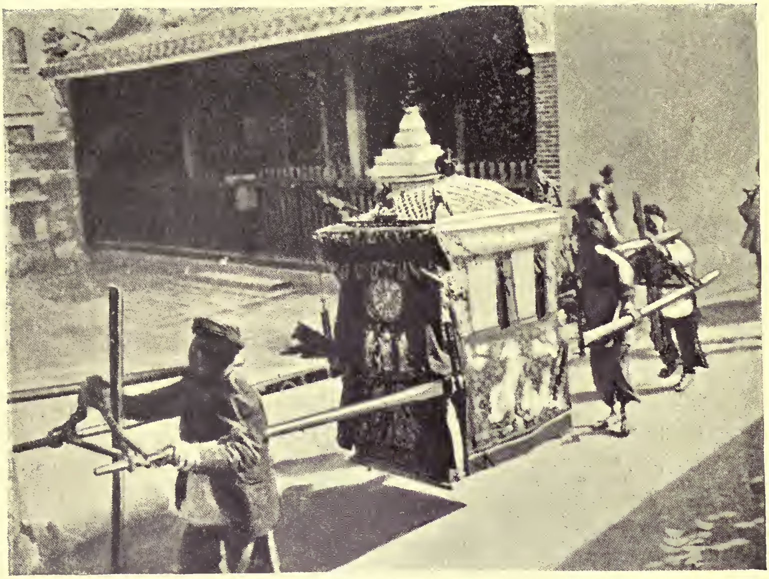
And so rapid after rapid is passed, some of which are so steep that the water races down them like a mill stream, and others so gentle in their decline that we can only tell we are passing them by the quickened motion of the stream. Finally, we dash through the last one and find ourselves in smooth water. We breathe a sigh of content as we look back over the turbulent reaches in the distance, and are thankful to have come safely through them to the end of our adventurous journey.

CHAPTER XIX

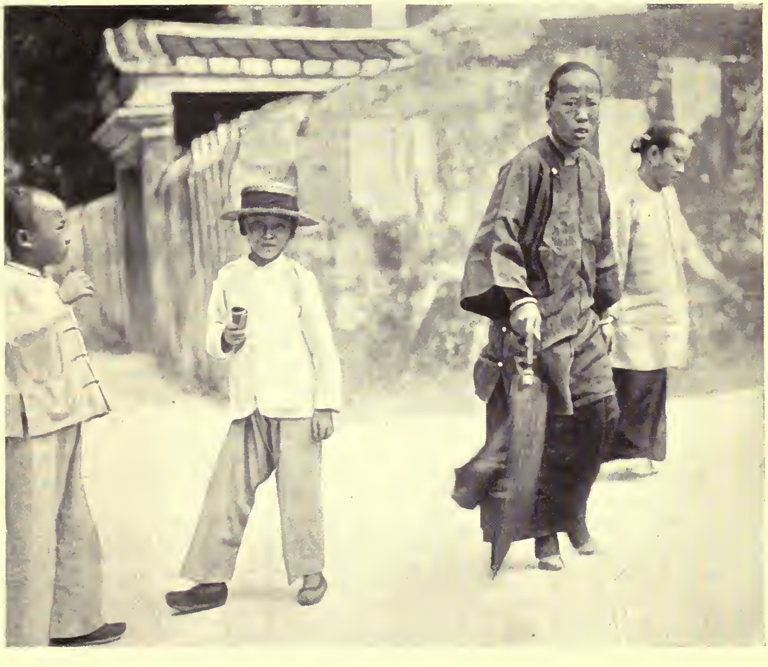
HOME AND FAMILY LIFE

THE Chinese are a thoroughly domesticated people and have a great affection for their home. It would seem, indeed, as though their love for that had left no room for patriotism in their hearts. The enthusiasm that an Englishman has for his country, and his readiness to suffer and die for it, are sentiments that are unknown to a Chinese. His whole devotion and affection are centred in his home. He is quite content to spend his life in it. From childhood to old age he is willing to remain in the spot where it is, amongst the same neighbours and in the midst of the same surroundings. If necessity should compel him to go abroad, his heart is always in the old home, and during the months or the years that he may be absent from it he never falters in his fixed purpose to return to it as soon as circumstances will allow him.

I once became acquainted with a Chinese who had lived in Australia for twenty-five years. He had prospered in business, had married an Irish wife and had three strapping daughters, with Milesian noses and languishing, almond-shaped eyes. One day he informed his family that the home hunger was upon him and that he was going to return to the land of roast pig and birds'-nest soup, so, with a keen sense of justice, he handed over his shop and a certain amount of ready money to his wife that if rightly managed would enable her to live in comfort for many years to come. He then bade them goodbye for ever and started off with a light heart for his far-off home, in an insignificant broken-down-looking village by the sea, where the conditions of life were dreary in the extreme. When he reached it he seemed to take up his life at the point



A BRIDE ON HER WAY TO BE MARRIED.



WOMEN WITH "GOLDEN LILIES."

from which he had parted with it a quarter of a century ago. It was easy for him to do this, for during all that time the vision that had floated before his mind, and that had given it the one bit of romance he ever had, was the squalid home that looked out on the dreary sands and mud flats that stretched out in front of it.

That the homes of the Chinese in the great majority of instances are bound together by genuine love and affection I am firmly convinced, though from an English point of view this would seem impossible. The young people who are commencing their married life have never seen each other till the day when the bride, carried in solemn state in the crimson sedan-chair, is ushered, a complete stranger, into the family where she is to spend her life. There has been no love-making, no letters in which vows have been made and the language of love ransacked in order to get the choicest phrases in which to express the devotion of their hearts. There has been no visiting of the families to get better acquainted with each other, and to learn whether the proposed alliance is a suitable one or not. The whole affair, in which is involved the happiness of the two people most concerned, is left to the middle-woman, a person whose reputation for truthfulness is known to be bad, and whose sole aim is to get the marriage preliminaries settled so that she may pocket her fees and perquisites.

The bride leaves her mother's side in tears, solitary and alone, for neither father nor mother may accompany her on the road that separates her for ever, for weal or woe, from the home of her childhood. She travels to her new home her heart filled with doubts and fears, wondering what kind of a mother-in-law she is going to meet, and what sort of a man her husband is; whilst he, with his heart beating with an emotion that he must not let any one dream of, is waiting for the coming of a bride who may either fill his home with an endless joy or cloud it with sorrow and disappointment.

I have seen a bride when she has first crossed the threshold of her new home and have felt that the ordeal she had to pass through was a most trying one. Not a word of welcome greeted her as she entered and met the critical gaze of the groups who strained their eyes to see what kind of a woman she was. No hands were outstretched, and no loving arms were wound around her. The bridegroom, it is true, met her at the door, but without a smile or a word. He did not dare to touch her hand as he led her into the bridal chamber, but slightly catching hold of the sleeves of her dress with the tips of his finger and thumb, as though it were infected with the plague, he turned his face away from her, and put on the air of a man who was absolutely bored by this little ceremony that etiquette compelled him to perform. On such an occasion as this the newly-married couple see each other for the first time, and in the swift and lightning glances they take at each other they try and conceive what the future has in store for them. The young couple have none of the pleasurable excitement always connected with us with the wedding-day. There is no wedding breakfast, no trooping of friends to see the happy pair off on their wedding tour, no throwing of old slippers or showering of rice, and on coming home after the honeymoon to their own house, where they shall set up for themselves. Such a thing is never done in China. No matter how many sons there may be in a family, they all bring their brides to the old homestead where they have been reared, and the mother and father remain the heads just as when their children were small.

It is this singular custom that is at the root of a great deal of the suffering that young married women have undoubtedly to endure in China. The mother-in-law is just as dreaded a power in this land as she is in some of the Western ones, but it is the daughter-in-law who is the sufferer. From the moment that the bride enters her home she is under her authority, and, if the latter happens to have a temper, the poor girl may reckon that for some years to come her lot will not be an easy one. No matter how ill-treated or persecuted she may be, she dare not appeal to her husband for redress. Although his heart may bleed for his wife, and he may be indignant at the cruelty with which her life is made wretched, he must not utter a syllable in her defence, nor show by any signs that he thinks his mother wrong. To do so would only arouse the fiercest passions against the unhappy girl, and cause her lot to be made bitter and intolerable. It would, moreover, excite the indignation of his parents and of the neighbours, who would taunt him with being unfilial, a reproach that has a nameless terror from which every man shrinks in this country. This custom of keeping the families together is a very ancient one, and instances abound in the better class of society where hundreds of people constitute one great household who live in patriarchal style and never so much as dream of setting up separate establishments of their own.

History records the name of one famous home that numbered several thousands of people. They were the children of nine generations, and though so numerous the story got abroad that the most absolute and perfect harmony existed among them all. No one ever quarrelled ; the women never had any jealousies ; the children never showed temper with each other, or wanted to grab each other's toys ; and even the very dogs, touched by the mysterious influences that reigned as an atmosphere over the place, had laid aside their natural instincts and would quietly, and with a wag of the tail, look on complacently whilst another was indulging in the luxury of a bone, without any attempt to take it from him.

The rumour of this reached the palace of the Emperor and in one of his tours to the sacred mountain Tai, on the top of which he annually worshipped God, he determined to call on this famous household and see for himself whether the reports that had travelled through the country were true or not. He was highly pleased with what he saw, and from a careful examination he came to the conclusion that Fame had not exaggerated these stories she had told about this model home. Sitting chatting with the man who was recognised as the head of the establishment, he asked him to explain to him the secret of the concord and harmony which prevailed amongst the people under his control. Taking a sheet of paper, the chief began to write out rapidly character after character until he had written a hundred. Handing it to the Emperor, he said, "Your Majesty will find in these words a sufficient reason why quarrels are utterly unknown amongst us."

The Emperor began to read, but he soon discovered that the whole consisted of one word repeated a hundred times, and that word was "forbearance." "We train ourselves," said the patriarch of this truly royal home, "to be patient with each other in a hundred different ways, to school ourselves not to lose our tempers, but to bear with one another. Even the very children are taught, from the earliest moment they can understand, to restrain their tempers. The result is the good feeling and sympathy for each other that has made us famous."

The lot of the young married couple depends very largely upon the character of the mother-in-law. If she is naturally good-tempered and easy-going, then things in the home will go smoothly and the lives of all will be happy and contented. If, however, she is strong-minded, and has an imperious will, it may be safe to predict that the daughter-in-law will be made to feel she is by no means mistress in her own home. If in time she should be fortunate enough to have a son, her lot will at once be greatly improved, for with his coming she attains a certain dignity that she never loses, and though she is still under the same stern rule, a modified spirit of independence was born at the same time that the heir appeared in the home.

There is something specially attractive to the Oriental mind about the idea of a son. He is the longing of the father, the ideal of the mother, and the pride of his grandfather and grandmother. Around him gather all the sentiment, poetry, and ambition that the Chinese heart is capable of. He is a possible glory to the family,[1] and in the future he may be enrolled among the scholars of the country, wealth and honours may be showered upon him, and through him his family be placed amongst the aristocracy of the land.

Should these brilliant dreams, however, fail to be realised, there is one thing reserved for him that he will have the supreme right to do, and that is to become the high priest of the family. When death has come into

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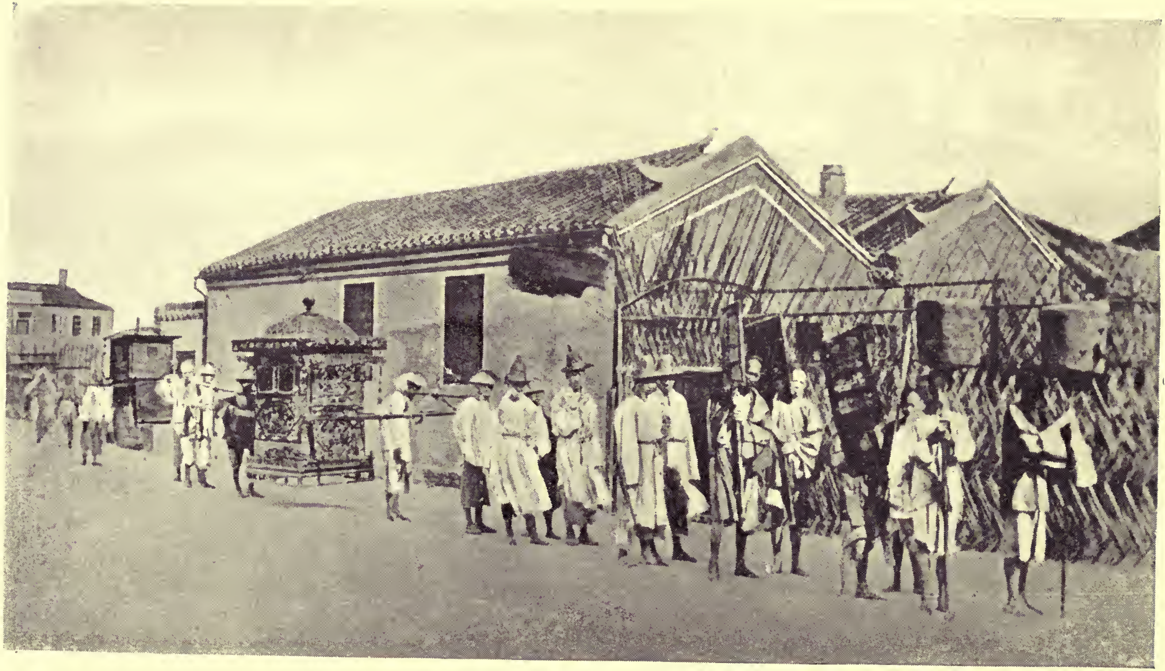
[1] See Macgowan's "Imperial History of China" for a full account of this.



BRIDAL PROCESSION.

the home and father or mother has been taken away, it is he who will stand on the borders of the invisible world and make the offerings that men believe will reach the beloved ones in the "Land of Shadows" beyond, to ease the pain and bitterness that are the lot of men in that unknown land. The shadows of the other world lie heavily on the imagination in this, and is it any wonder that men long for sons, since they believe that they can only be lifted by those that are born to them here?

Should, however, the young wife be so unlucky as to have a daughter, then only too often her sorrows will be aggravated, as she will fall, not only in the estimation of her haughty mother-in-law, but also in her own, and it may possibly be in that of her husband as well. They have all been looking for a son. They have planned for him, and forecast his future, and determined what he shall do so often, that they have all come to believe that the child must be a son, and now after all it is only a daughter!

The mother weeps and refuses to look at the little one. The mother-in-law is furious and scornful, and even the husband, though his love for his wife may restrain him from expressions that might add to her pain, is gloomy and discontented. The neighbours, who have been prepared to give a royal welcome to the son, now speak in whispers to each other and refrain from adding to the shame of the family by any attempts at congratulation. When it is known in the home that the baby that is born is a girl, a shock is felt that vibrates throughout every member of the family, and it is at this precise moment that it is impossible to say what may happen to the poor little mite that has so disappointed the hopes of those who had been looking for a son. She may at once be put to death by some member of the family, or she may be pitched out into the courtyard in front of the house and be left to perish, or, perhaps, some neighbour, who has a young son, comes in and begs the child, which she will rear up with him and make him his wife in the future. Should there be any delay in thus disposing of the baby, the chances are all in favour that her life will be preserved, and that she will be accepted as a member of the family. After a few hours have elapsed, and bitter tears have been shed and her bad fortune has been bewailed, the mother takes the little thing to her heart, and the mother-love, that seemed dead, springs up. As she looks into the little face and feels her clinging to her breast, a wave of tenderness passes over her and, though she never loves a daughter as she would a son, Nature asserts her power over her and causes love to grow for the little one.

Let us now suppose that some years have elapsed since the youthful bride, solitary and with her heart full of anxiety, stepped into her new home, every face strange to her and with not a word of welcome to greet her. She has now several sons and one or two daughters, and her mother-in-law is still there ; but though her word is still law, new forces have come into the home that have helped to break the tyranny of those early days, when tears and sighs played their part in her life.

The boys are at school preparing for the future. The eldest is to be a scholar, and the mother looks upon him with kindling eyes and glowing face, very much as an English mother would, for he promises to do honour to the family. The second is still studying, but he has no love for books, and he declares that he has made up his mind to be a business man and that he will remain at school only as long as will enable him to read and write such a letter as might be required of him in the office. The third has made up his mind to go abroad to Singapore and live with an uncle there and help him in his shop. He is a boy overflowing with animal spirits. If there is any mischief going on, he is sure to be in it. He is the life of the whole family, and the tease too, as his sisters know to their cost ; but the mother has many an anxious thought about him, and she fears that his merry, careless disposition may lead him astray, and that should he go abroad he may never return, or, if he do, it will be like the prodigal who had lost all in that far-off land.

And so the father's and mother's hearts are perplexed with questions about their children, just as ours are in distant England. How will the boys turn out? Will they fall into evil ways and weave wrinkles into the faces of their parents and fill their hearts with sighs?

And then, too, what about their girls, for Nature now has gained her point, and the passing years have bound them to father and mother with a love that comes nearly up to that they have for the boys. Will their new homes be happy ones? Will their mothers-in-law oppress them? Will their husbands be good and true men, or will they be opium-smokers and gamblers and make life a misery to them? These are well-worn subjects the wide world over, and when we see the fathers and mothers of this yellow race, that we are apt to think so radically different from the rest of the world, concerned in their home life about questions that perplex us, we accept the statement that "God has made of one blood all the nations of men to dwell on all the face of the earth" as a divinely true one.

As I have already observed, there is no doubt that husband and wife in the great majority of homes in China are bound to each other by genuine, undoubted love. At first sight this seems difficult to be believed. Not only do the young people never catch sight of one another until the moment that they stand side by side as man and wife in the husband's home, but it is an undoubted fact that the great mass of the women of this land are very deficient in personal charm. Fortunately, good looks are not the things that cause love to grow in a man's or a woman's heart. As time goes by, other forces come into play that make the plain face shine with a beauty of its own; and soon the hearts are knit together as though Cupid himself had twined the golden chain that bound them in a common love.

A casual observer would never see this. He would only discover that husband and wife seemed singularly cold to each other, and never by any chance could he catch a single endearment falling from the lips of either of them. One day, in order to test her, a Chinese lady was asked by an English girl whether she loved her husband. The question startled her. It was like a thunderbolt out of a clear sky. Her face became flushed. She hesitated for a moment, and then she promptly replied, "No, certainly not." The girl knew differently, and, being very intimate with her, at last drew from her the hesitating, blushing confession that she loved him with all her heart. Now, nothing in all the world would have ever induced her to have said this to one of her own people. She would not have acknowledged it to her own mother, and wild horses could not have dragged this secret from her heart if any other Chinese had been present. To know the depth of a woman's love for her husband, you must wait until he has been taken away from her by death. Come then and stand by the grave a day or two after he has been buried, and listen to her as she kneels in front of it, and amidst her tears, her sobs, and her loud lamentations you will hear the most wonderful confession of a heart's love that can be put into human language. She can do so now without a word of reproach from any one. Listen to her: "Oh! my heart, my love, my life, where are you gone? I cannot live without you. My home is desolate, and darkness is over my heart. Come to me, precious one, or I shall die." She will go on for an hour like this, pouring out the great tragedy of her life in the language of most impassioned love, and showing by her skill in the use of words and phrases that describe the tenderest feelings of the heart how profound had been her devotion to the one who had been torn from her side.

I was at one time well acquainted with a middle-aged couple, for whom I had great respect. They were quiet, respectable people, about as far removed from sentiment, apparently, as any middle-aged couple could be. They were both exceedingly plain, if not actually ugly. Not a line of beauty could be traced in the countenances of either of them. Their life, too, was a humdrum one, and passed in a rough, coarse village at the foot of a range of mountains, far from the main road, and quite removed from the great world beyond, where men's hearts and brains are moved by thoughts that never penetrate to these lonely villages. One day the husband fell ill of a violent fever, and in three short days he passed away. Then was revealed what was never suspected before. That plain-featured woman, most unattractive in speech, without a single winning manner about her, had all the time been having her own romance; and the solemn-visaged husband, of uncouth speech and uncourtly ways, was her knight who had wound himself around her heart and had put music into her life. She was disconsolate at his death, and refused utterly to be comforted. Everything in life seemed from that moment to have lost its charm for her. The one for whom she had lived had vanished and with him the hold that life had had upon her was gone. Within ten days she had died of a broken heart, leaving her two children, who had no power to allure her from her grief, to my fatherly care.

That there are unhappy homes in China, where husbands and wives dispute and quarrel with each other, I do not doubt. The same is the case in countries where men and women fall in love and willingly marry each other. All that I would wish to hold is that China is not a loveless land, where a stern and unromantic custom drives men into unions that are repulsive to them, but that in this "Flowery Land" there are as true love-knots tied as ever were fastened by the loving hands of the most romantic and the most devoted affection.

The reader will now be prepared to believe that the wife is not the down-trodden person she is often supposed to be. There is a popular idea, mainly gained from books and from the exaggerated statements of travellers, that the woman in the Orient is a kind of slave, who dares not open her mouth in the presence of her husband, who tyrannises over her and makes her submissive to his will. This is an entire mistake. In the very nature of the case it must be so. Nature has imparted to a woman a most mysterious power of attraction that is a safeguard to her, and that saves her from being crushed as men are by men. The battle of life would indeed be a continued defeat for her were she not protected in her weakness by an invisible force that is stronger than the mightiest battlements by which men would defend themselves from the oppressor. Cases of hardship continually occur in family life in China, but they are not special to this land. As far as a long experience would enable me to judge, I verily believe that the majority of homes in this country are reasonably happy ones, and the wives hold a position not of sufferance but of love.

The Chinese conception of a home varies very considerably from ours. They do not seem to take into account that there are certain elements that are essential to the making up of what we consider to be a happy home. For example, amongst the five eternal virtues enumerated by Mencius, unfortunately cleanliness is not one. If it had been, it might have changed the whole character of the nation. At present dust and dirt and disorder are the normal conditions of life of nearly every Chinese. You step into any home of the middle and lower classes and you get a shock. Comfort seems to have been the last thing aimed at in the building of it. Things are grimy and unwashed, and are tossed about without any regard to the general effect they might possibly have in making the house look pleasant. The floors, which are earthen, are swept now and again in the middle, but under chairs and tables, and especially beds, the accumulated dust is as sure of being undisturbed as is the Chinese face, or the bloated spiders that look down calmly and with a knowing wink from the rafters overhead. It would seem, too, as though the furniture had been made with a special view to discomfort. The chairs are stiff-backed and angular, and evidently designed by the founders of the race to discourage their descendants from sitting too much. The wooden benches that supplement these are so narrow that a person using them, by and by unconsciously, leans forward and relieves his weariness by resting his elbows on his knees, like the typical American sitting on a rail in the backwoods. It is no doubt for the same reason that a Chinese is so much given to sitting on his heels, and it is no uncommon sight to see a man perched upon one of these benches in a position that an Englishman could hardly endure for ten minutes, but which, to a Chinese, is an ideal way of passing his leisure time.

The beds are on the same plane as the rest of the furniture, and consist of the ordinary four posts, with a bottom made of hard boards. The only covering laid on these is a thin mat made of rushes, on which the people sleep. An Occidental would writhe and wriggle the livelong night, and the next morning his body would be full of pains and aches, whilst a Chinese would sleep as calmly as though he were reposing on a feather-bed. The pillow is a curiosity in its way, but an Englishman would consider it a veritable instrument of torture. It is not intended to be something soft and comfortable on which to recline the head, but simply as a rest for the neck. It consists of a variety of articles according to the financial position of the individual. With the very poor it is a block of wood or a brick. This is placed under the nape of the neck. It would seem to be an exceedingly uncomfortable place to have such a pillow, but the nation with singular unanimity has selected to have it there and nowhere else. The richer have more elaborate and expensive ones, but always of some hard and unyielding substance, and rich and poor alike consider that its function is to support the neck and not the head. This pillow is to my mind one of the evidences of the indirect method by which the Chinese brain reaches its conclusions. We maintain that the head ought to be elevated during sleep. They believe the same, only they hold that this can be best done through the medium of the neck. You tell a Chinese that you cannot conceive how he can endure such an uncomfortable thing as a brick set on end digging into his neck all night. His face beams with one of his bland and childlike smiles at the utter absurdity of your remark, whilst he assures you that it is all a matter of habit. It is to him one of the signs of the inferiority of the barbarian that he cannot see how suitable a piece of wood with the rough edge digging into his neck is for a dreamless sleep during the long hours of the night.

Family life is robbed of some of its special attractions to an Englishman in its utter want of privacy. Such a thing as a private house, in the sense that it is sedulously guarded from the outside world, is unknown to the Chinese. I have frequently been travelling in the interior where the sight of a foreigner has plunged a whole neighbourhood into a perfect frenzy of excitement. Crowds have followed me everywhere. They stared at me in the streets, and surrounded me if I stopped for a moment to look at anything. They followed me down narrow lanes, where I made a dash to get away from them, and I was met by a fresh contingent at the other end, who had made a flank movement to get a better view of me. They smiled when I smiled, and thinking to please me they laughed outrageously at something I said, though there was not the ghost of a joke in it. When I moved on, the crowds automatically followed, as though they were my shadow. They never got wearied of gazing at me, or at something on my person. My eyes being different from the universal black of the nation caused prolonged stares and original criticism. The two buttons on the back of my coat started a series of speculations as to their precise use in buttoning up.

At length, to escape the persistent attentions of my friendly but critical following, I dived into the house of a respectable-looking man, who had politely invited me to come in and sit down, in the hope that I should get rid of my admirers. In this I was mistaken, however. The crowd entered with me, as though the place belonged to the whole company, and they made themselves completely at home. Most of them, indeed, came to stay as long as I did. Some walked about and made miscellaneous remarks. Others filled their bamboo pipes that they generally carry about with them, and soon polluted the air with the disgusting smell of their bad tobacco. Others lounged about and took notes of everything, whilst a select knot drew a semicircle round the chair in which I was seated, and continued to gaze with unabated interest at me. The owner of the house did not appear to think there was anything out of the way in this intrusion upon the privacy of his home. He chatted with the crowd, smoked his bamboo pipe, and now and then smiled upon me as though he were highly pleased with everything.

A Chinese has never been trained to believe in privacy. It is only the well-to-do who ever dream of having a house all to themselves, and even then it is almost sure to be shared by some near relatives who have some claim upon them. The common people cannot afford the luxury of a home all their own. The houses, consequently, are so built that they are capable of accommodating more families than one. Within one

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compound there may be a half a dozen of these, who seem to make no attempt to conceal their doings from each other. Questions that we should deem it advisable to discuss with closed doors, and after we had carefully peered round to see that there were no eavesdroppers, are talked about before their neighbours, who will stand silently taking in every word that has been said. The result of all this is that there are no secrets in China. Everybody knows everything about everybody else. What salary a man gets, how much he is in debt, what shady transactions he has been engaged in, and how much he spent on the last feast he gave are known with as much exactness as they are to the individuals themselves. The Chinese mind is a wonderful storehouse of dates and facts. These it treasures up, and brings forth as occasion requires. This peculiarity of the Chinese is one of the mysteries that perplex the foreigner. In many things they are most sensitive to public opinion, and to save his " face " a man will resort to all kinds of cunning devices and subterfuges, and yet he voluntarily deprives himself of the privacy of his home and allows the world to learn the minutest details of his life there.

There is another feature about the Chinese home that seems to give it a charm to the inmates, but which would render it intolerable to the average Englishman, and that is the absence of quiet in it. The doors are open the livelong day ; every sound from the street, as well as the voices of the neighbours in the adjoining compartments, penetrates it. The Chinese may be said to be bred and born amidst noise, until it would seem as though they could not live without it. The common people in their ordinary conversation talk as though they were speaking to some one in the next street. Schoolboys study their lessons at the loudest pitch to which their voices can be raised and amidst the roar of the whole school. The most effective and telling of the speeches in their plays on the streets are uttered amidst the beating of drums and the clang of cymbals, and when a mandarin leaves his post with the goodwill of his people, it is amidst the deafening noise of firecrackers that is enough almost to crack the drum of one's ear.

The Chinese seem to be absolutely without nerves. A door will go on slamming for hours, and no one will ever dream of getting up and closing it. A dog may whine and howl during the silent hours of the night in such a way as would make an Englishman mad, but a Chinese is as calm and unmoved as though he heard no sound, and no one gets into a fit of irritation and suggests that it should be either kicked or shot. An ass stands in a paddock near by, and, with ears erect, will utter its sweet music for hours, but it would be treated with the same patience as though it were a nightingale filling the air with its charming song. And so the children shout and romp, and the scholar sits within earshot in his study, and people sit conversing with each other, and in a room close by lies a man tossing with fever, whose head is likely to split with pain, but no one suggests that the play should be suspended, or a stick be shown to frighten off the delinquents. A Chinese is inured to noise. He spends his life in the middle of it. It is the prevailing atmosphere of his home, and when he dies it is the great ambition of his life that he shall be escorted to the grave with the sounds of weeping and lamentation and with the weird and ear-splitting music of the ragged and unsavoury-looking band, who fill the air with their doleful funeral sounds.

Notwithstanding the objectionable features that for us would detract from the comfort of home, there is no question but that it has the same charm for the Chinese that it has for us. This is as true of the most poverty-stricken as it is of the wealthy. He cannot bear to be away long from it, and if he is compelled by poverty to be separated from it, the thought of when he shall be able to return to it is constantly in his mind. I have known men who, like the Swiss, have had the veritable *mal du pays* or home sickness, and who were only saved from a serious illness, or from losing their reason, by getting back to their friends and their home.

CHAPTER XX

FARMERS AND FARMING

CHINA is an essentially agricultural country. The great mass of the people are farmers, and spend their lives in the cultivation of the countless farms that cover the face of the whole country. If one were to visit the great commercial centres, such as Shanghai, Hankow, or Canton, and see the miles of shops that stand closely studded together, and watch the crowds that throng along the narrow streets, he would come to the conclusion that commerce was the one forte of the Chinese.

Again, if he were to travel up the great rivers and waterways of this empire and see the ceaseless succession of junks that pass up and down at all hours of the day and night with their cargoes, he would feel still more convinced that the supreme thought in the Chinaman's heart was business. Or once again, if he were to stand by the side of the great trunk roads that connect the east and the west, and the various cities along the route with each other, and mark the endless stream of horses and mules and human carriers bearing the produce of many provinces to each other, he would again be inclined to imagine that trade was the main thought that absorbed the energies of the nation.

In all this he would be mistaken. There is no one in the whole of this great empire that is in such evidence as the farmer, for he meets you not only on his farm but also in many other callings where you would not expect to find him. In fact, it would be difficult to go into any line of life, where hard work is demanded, where you would not come across him.

The men that do the heavy work of the cities and carry in the goods with which the shops and warehouses are stocked are mainly farmers. They seem a rough, rowdy-looking lot of men and are called by way of contempt coolies, but almost every man is a skilled farmer, and seen on his farm would appear a very different person from the grimy, unkempt-looking savage who stands almost naked in a sweltering hold, hauling about great packages that would overtax the strength of any ordinary European. The men that stand alongside the main roads and beg to be employed as chair-bearers—a task that would seem possible only for men trained and inured to this particular work—are all farmers. Their crops are in and they have some idle time on their hands. They have the thews and sinews to do the work, and though they may not carry their fares with the deftness and knack of the trained men, they will bring them more swiftly to his journey's end and make less fuss, and cheat them less than the regular chair-bearers.

If a man is going to make an excursion to the top of some mountain, he will desire to have surefooted and strong, enduring fellows who will carry him along the edge of deep ravines and up the giddy heights where the only roads are footpaths that the goats and the wild animals have made. When he comes to start he will find a sunburnt set of men, with muscles as hard as iron, with not a superfluous ounce of flesh, and trained by severe toil to endure hardship. When he asks who these men are, they will say: "We are farmers and we guarantee to carry you safely to the highest peaks of the mountain and bring you back unharmed."

You make a journey up one of the great rivers, and you engage a boat with its captain and crew. They are a pleasant, homely set of men, most willing and agreeable, and ever ready, when the breeze fails or the tide is too strong, to take to the oars, and for hours keep on rowing without murmur or complaint. Every man of them is a farmer, and when the voyage is over they will return to their homes, and, should no new engagement claim them, they will proceed about the business of their farms as though they had never sailed a boat in their lives.

You watch a fleet of fishing-boats come in from sea. It has been blowing great guns outside and the men's faces are browned with the storm. They have shown a deftness in carrying their craft over high waves, and through great blasts of wind that threatened to overturn their frail-looking boats, that one would imagine to be the result of a life's training. Every man amongst them, however, is first of all a farmer, and when the fish have been sold and the boats are anchored in some quiet bay, or hauled up on the beach close by their homes, they spend their time, till they have to go to sea again, in their fields.

It is sheer necessity that has developed the versatility of the farmer, and his appearance in so many different employments is entirely due to his poverty. The farms are small and families are large, and to keep the home together it is a case of absolute necessity that the male members of the family should go forth and engage in any kind of labour that will bring grist to the mill. The facility with which the farmer can turn his hand to any kind of unskilled work, and his great physical powers of endurance, make him an acquisition to those in search of labourers. The Chinese farmer, in appearance at least, is very different from his English prototype. He has not that jolly, burly, rosy-cheeked look that has been so well portrayed in the pages of *Punch*. He gives one the impression of a man whose life has been spent in downright hard work. There is not a single ounce of spare flesh upon him. His face and hands are of a dark brown colour, tanned into them by exposure to the fiery-faced sun of the Orient and to the open-air influence amid which his daily life is spent. His hands, unless he is still young, are gnarled and twisted out of shape by the constant grasping of his hoe, the one implement that to the Chinese farmer takes the place of the spade, only in a more extensive degree.

He never stands erect. He bends a little forward, having a slight list to the left. This is due to his having to do all his own carrying work, which in England is done by horses and carts. The manure to fertilise his fields and the water to irrigate them when the rains are insufficient are all borne on the left shoulder of the sturdy farmer ; and when the ripened crops are housed, and the surplus is to be disposed of in the city miles away, it is the same mode of conveyance that has again to be employed. Railroads, carts, wagons, and beasts of burden are luxuries that are still beyond the reach of the farmers of this land.

The whole look of the man is that of a worker, and the very pose that his body has taken is but an attempt to ease the strain that severe labour is constantly putting on it. Unfortunately, his dress does not add to his personal appearance. It consists of a loose coat, buttoned by a flap on one side, and reaching to a little below the hips. The trousers are loose and baggy, and extend to the knees. These and his usual clothing are made of cotton cloth, which is dyed with the universal blue that seems to have such a fascination for the working classes. As the weather grows colder, others of the same kind, and where the purse will allow of it, wadded garments are added, but the legs and the feet, even in the coldest weather, remain uncovered, excepting on very special occasions, when etiquette demands that both shoes and stockings shall be worn.

The Chinese farmer further adds to his far from prepossessing appearance by his utter neglect of all habits of neatness. His head is shaved only at considerable intervals of time, and so the place that amongst the residents of the towns is clean shaved is covered with a thick, bristly undergrowth of black hair, that has a most untidy and slovenly look. His queue, instead of being plaited and combed smoothly, is allowed to grow at its own sweet will, and, following the instincts of Nature, that longs for freedom, it sends out straggling tufts here and there, and so gives the wearer an unkempt and disorderly aspect.

Reckless about his head and queue, he is equally so concerning his face and hands. Nature here has to come in with her gentle art and make up for what soap and water ought to have done. Washing seems to be a lost art amongst the working classes, and especially amongst the farmers. It is well that their skins are tanned the colour they are. Fair skins with blue eyes and golden hair were evidently meant for men who believed in the virtue of water. The labouring men in this land have concealed their dislike of it under brown skins and black eyes and hair, and so their neglect of cleanliness is not so striking nor so repulsive.

This description of the farmer is a faithful one, but by no means an adverse one. He is a real good fellow in the main, and our sympathies are decidedly with him rather than against him. He is about as good a specimen of a man, who stands up to his work and does it, as can be found the wide world over. There is no whining about him. The conditions in which he lives are all against making life easy. His food as a rule is wanting in variety and is deficient in nutritive qualities. His three meals a day, when he is lucky enough to get so many, are simply a repetition of each other, and consist of boiled rice, seasoned with salted turnip or cabbage, varied with the commoner and cheaper kinds of salt fish, beans, curds, and pickled beans or cucumbers. In very many districts throughout the empire rice is a luxury that the poorer classes can only hope to get a dozen times or so during the whole course of the year. Sweet potatoes are then the staple food upon which they have to depend, supplemented with salted cabbage or turnip as the condiment. It can be easily imagined how insufficient a diet of this kind is to build up healthy men and women. The fact is the working classes, especially in the country districts, are anything but robust and sturdy people.

Foreign physicians, who have opened hospitals and treated large numbers of those who have consulted them, have come to the conclusion that the large majority of the population is below par and is suffering from indigestion. Salted turnip, which is a popular condiment, persistently eaten through all the months of the year, is very much responsible for this latter ailment. But it is cheap, and so the evil has to be endured. It would be an interesting question to discuss what effect this general and widespread indigestion has upon the character of the people and upon the course of their history. A dyspeptic person in England very often is afflicted with an uncertain temper, is fanciful, and has curious theories of life. What, then, about the great mass of the Chinese population with their age-to-age succession of dyspeptic disorders? Are these in any way a reason for the oblique way in which the mind of this people is often apt to run, and for many curious events in their past history that seem so difficult of explanation from a European standpoint? This is a point that is well worth considering.

To my mind, the Chinese is a really heroic character, especially so in the way in which he meets life. The struggle he has to make is a severe one physically. For the sorrows that come to all men he has no consolations of religion to sustain him, for the idols are never supposed to bring any sympathy or comfort to him. He has absolutely to stand alone with his own brave heart, and with an unflinching purpose he does his work and cares for his family as though there were no sacrifices involved and no merit whatever in what he is doing.

The feeling that one has for him is not pity but admiration. He is really perfectly unconscious of the attitude he is taking. Those black, restless eyes show a mind by no means oppressed by the hardships of life, and the merry twinkle that makes them dance when something witty is said shows that this matter-of-fact-looking man can enjoy a joke as thoroughly as those whose lives are placed in easier circumstances. There is no question but that the profound sense of humour that the Chinese people possess has saved them from sinking beneath the burdens that they have had to bear in the battle of life.

The Chinese farmer is a perfect adept at his work. He seems to have entered into the very heart and spirit of the vegetable kingdom and to have learned all its secrets. His crops are put in apparently without any special effort, and yet they bud and sprout in the very form he had intended, and if the rains will only fall, they repay him with harvests that make his heart sing for joy. His hand is just as facile with flowers as it is with the coarser productions of the soil. He loves them, and, with this consciousness in them, they respond with generous devotion to the care he lavishes upon them. Every Chinese farmer is capable of becoming at a moment's notice a gentleman's gardener, for with his quick eye in studying the habits of flowers he soon becomes expert in developing their finest qualities.

It is amusing to watch a rough-looking fellow who looks like an escaped convict, with bare legs and scanty clothes, manipulating the beautiful flowers of a large garden. They are exquisitely kept. Every plant looks its best. It would seem as though each one knew that his eye was upon it, and it was a matter of honour to appear in its finest dress. You ask the man where he acquired such a knowledge of flowers as to be able to care for such a fine garden as this. He looks at you with surprise as he replies: "Don't you know I am a farmer? Of course I ought to know about flowers seeing that for many years I worked my own farm, a thing far more difficult to do than this, seeing that I have every convenience at my hand to assist me."

The chief productions in the South of China are rice, sweet potatoes, wheat, barley, ground nuts, millet, sugar-cane, indigo, and a great variety of vegetables, such as turnips, carrots, beans, cabbages, cauliflowers, cucumbers, tomatoes, egg plants, melons, &c. The most important of all the cereals produced by the Chinese farmer is rice. This is the staple food of rich and poor, and takes the place that wheat does in England. Its cultivation is by no means an easy one. It may safely be said that from the time the crop is sown until it is safely harvested the farmer's mind is never free from anxiety. His first step is to select a small plot of ground that can easily be flooded. Into the water standing in this the rice is thickly sown. In a short time it sprouts up very luxuriantly, being of a beautiful bright green colour that is most charming to the eye. After it has reached the height of six or seven inches it is pulled by the roots, and made up into small bundles of five or six. These are then planted in the rice-fields proper, at a distance of about eight or nine inches apart. From this time till within a few days of the harvesting of the crop the fields must have at least two or three inches of standing water in them. To allow them to get dry would be to insure the death of the crop.

There are two plantings of rice a year. The first is in April and the second is in the end of July. The gathering in of the latter takes place in November, and then the toil and anxiety connected with two great crops of the year are ended. The greatest source of trouble to the farmer is to secure a sufficient supply of water, so that the growing rice shall always be standing in it. This is no easy matter. If the rains have been abundant, and the springs are overflowing, and the wells and ponds that abound in the neighbourhood of these are full, his mind is comparatively at rest. If they are not, then he is always on the rack as to how he shall fight against the great fiery sun overhead that sends down his burning rays and licks up the water that he needs for his precious rice. As the time goes on and the rains fail to descend, his sorrows become more intense. After a time the ponds dry up. The great sun blazes down from an unclouded sky, and with insatiable thirst drinks up the water that is moistening the roots of the rice. The soil now cracks with the fervent heat and every blade of rice seems to be making an appeal to the heartbroken farmer for the water that alone will enable it to live.

He is now at his wits' end to save his crop, for that, perhaps, is the only thing now that lies between him and poverty and despair. So many of these farmers live upon the very borders of a land that, like a vast howling wilderness, sees only the wrecks of human life, and where family life and family ties are buried beneath the pitiless sands. The failure of a crop means very likely that he will have to sell his daughter or son perhaps, or even barter away his wife, if he would keep the homestead from slipping from his grasp.

Some of the most piteous scenes, in the many tragic ones that cast their shadow over the home in the experience of the Chinese husbandman, can be witnessed during the summer months when there has been a shortage in the fall of rain. The wells have become dry and the little ponds have been drained of every drop of water they contained. The rice in the fields has lost the dark green colour that with its rich sheen tells of health and vitality, and is turning into a sickly yellow that means decay and death. Water must be got now, and at any price, for two or three days more of this will see the crop blasted in the fields. The farmer accordingly digs the ponds deeper to catch the tiniest rills that may flow into them, and as the work in the blazing sun might at once drink these up, the work is carried on during the midnight hours, so that not a drop of the precious fluid may be absorbed by the great thirsty dragon in the sky.

Oftentimes these most pathetic endeavours to save the crops end in tragedy and death. Men are making a supreme effort to avert disaster from their homes, and in the mad endeavour to gain the water for themselves the wildest passions of the heart are aroused, and neighbours will struggle with each other for the slowly-trickling rills. The solemn silence of night is broken with the sounds of conflict, and the stars looking down from the midnight sky see murder committed by men whose sole and controlling motive is the preservation of their homes.

It is astonishing what splendid results the Chinese farmer gets out of his farm, in spite of the fact that his farming implements are of the poorest possible description. His plough is a most elementary utensil and has evidently come down from the remote past, just as it was invented by the early founders of the nation. No one has dared during the process of ages to suggest that any improvement could be made upon a design that was conceived by persons so sacred as their ancestors, and so successive generations of farmers have held on to the clumsy antiquity as though it had been the result of a special inspiration that would be blasphemy to attempt to improve on. It simply consists of an iron share fastened to a rough, slender pole that serves as a handle, by which the ploughman may guide it when he is upturning the soil. It is a small, insignificant thing as compared with our English ploughs, for it is only about twenty or thirty pounds in weight and would be absolutely useless in wet, heavy lands. This primitive implement is thoroughly suited for light and sandy soils, where the farmer never dreams of going much below the surface ; and that he can get such excellent crops with an article that our home farmers would look upon with scorn is a tribute to the skill with which he knows how to manipulate the fields, so as to extract from them the treasures they possess.

The harrow is very much of the same pattern as that used in England, though, of course, less up-to-date and more old-world-looking. In addition to the two abovementioned tools, there is what, after all, is the most important implement that the farmer possesses for the cultivation of his farm, and that is the hoe. It takes the place of the spade with us, but it is more serviceable and is more economical of labour. As the main work of the farmer is done by hand, this is a very important item to the hard-working Chinese. Unless actually ploughing, you never see him when engaged in work without his hoe. As he walks along the narrow paths that wind in and out amongst his fields you see it slung like a gun across his shoulder. He grasps it with his horny hand, which, through long and daily use, has unconsciously adapted itself to the shape of the handle so as to ease the strain of holding it. With this he transforms the old, worn-out-looking fields, so that as the seasons come round they forget their age and blossom into youth. With it he turns up the soil with a deftness that long experience has taught him ; he trims the paths that border his fields ; he places the manure near the roots of the growing potatoes, and he deepens his water-courses when they become choked with wild grasses and weeds. Large numbers of the farmers are too poor to afford oxen with which to plough their fields, and so the women members of their households have to do the work of these animals, or else, if they have none who can take their place, they have to do the whole work themselves with their hoes.

The astonishing success of the farmers in this country is not due altogether to their skill, or to the labour they put into their fields. These, no doubt, are most important elements in the production of fair and average crops out of lands that an English farmer would not look at. The real secret lies in his faith in manures and in his persistent and determined use of them. It is this that enables him through a long course of years without any rest or rotation of crops, and oftentimes from a very sandy or thin soil, to secure harvests that will keep his family from poverty. He holds firmly, and long experience sustains him in this, that even very poor land can be made productive if only sufficient manure be put into it. The population, moreover, of China is so dense and the farms are so small generally, that the holders cannot afford to allow any of the fields to lie fallow. To do so would mean starvation to the home. The difficulty is met by a liberal and judicious employment of manure.

Now, the question as to what was the best and at the same time the most economical to be used was discussed by the Chinese ages ago, and they came to the conclusion that there was nothing to be compared with night-soil. Succeeding generations have coincided with this opinion, and consequently it stands to-day pre-eminent among all the fertilisers employed by the farmers, as the best and cheapest that can be used. There is no question but that without it China would not be the country it is to-day, for in the poorer regions, where the land is comparatively barren and unproductive, many a tract of land would have lain desolate, and many a home that has sent forth distinguished sons, whose names have become famous throughout the empire, would have been extinguished.

This question of the night-soil is such a vital one, both from a sanitary and pecuniary point of view, that a most elaborate and perfect system has been devised for its collection. In the cities a considerable number of the poorer classes gain their living in connection with it. The authorities make no provision whatever for the sanitation of the towns. They leave this important business in the hands of the people, knowing that the gains from this one branch of the sewage will be sufficient to excite private enterprise that will be quite capable of meeting the difficulty. And this is really the case. Men with sufficient capital embark in a business that is a most paying one. They build latrines in almost every street and down alleyways and in obscure corners, close by the great thoroughfares, and on the main line where the flow of passengers never ceases the livelong day.

In addition to these they engage men to go round every morning to buy the refuse of the houses throughout the town. This is done openly and no disgrace whatever is supposed to be attached to it. It is done in the light of day and the neighbours are allowed to hear the chaffering and bargaining that go on. These purchases are then carried to some central latrine, where they are stored till the time comes for emptying it.

Once a month the farmers from the outlying districts come with their boats, and, anchoring off some place most convenient for their purpose, carry off the accumulation to their farms. This is done in the busy hours of the day, when the streets are crowded with people and trade is at its busiest. These night-soil men with their open buckets act as though the streets were their own, for in loud voices that can be heard away down the narrow arteries, they threaten to bump up against any one who will not get out of their way. This threat is so powerful that the densest crowd will scatter in a moment, and stand without a sound by the sides of the road as the scavenger passes by at a trot through the midst of them.

In the case of inland cities, the farmer or his wife or daughter, if he has any, comes in every day and carries off the refuse to the farm. There is one city of one hundred thousand inhabitants with which I am familiar. One day, travelling in one of its outskirts, I came up with a long line of women. A few of them were young. They were a light-hearted, merry party indeed. They all seemed to enjoy rude health and to have overflowing spirits, for they were full of laughter and jokes, and they made the road ring with the sound of their merry voices. It was a most pleasant sight to see so many women with such happy faces, upon which care never seemed to rest. They were just like a pack of schoolgirls let loose for their holidays. Each woman carried two buckets suspended from a bamboo pole on her left shoulder, containing their purchases from the neighbouring city. Every one that I saw was a farmer's daughter, who knew just as much about farming as did their husbands or fathers. I found, indeed, from inquiries that I made, that their husbands were in different parts of the country, striving to earn a few dollars, whilst their farms were left to the care of their wives. They did not seem at all distressed at the nature of their work, or at the severe tax upon their strength. Some had to carry their loads several miles, but this did not appear to distress their spirits, or restrain the jokes that bubbled up from their hearts and sent the laughter rippling up the road as the fun was caught by one after another of the groups of women that struggled along it.

Though night-soil is the staple manure, there are others that are used in addition to it. Bean cake [1] and bones are two fertilisers that are popular with the Chinese, both on account of their utility and also because of their cheapness.

The farms are generally small. This is the result of the custom regarding the division of property. When the farmer father dies, whatever land there may be has to be divided equally among the sons. The daughters do not count, as they are always married to members of their clans, and as they henceforward belong to them, they may no longer claim any inheritance in the one they have left. Successive divisions have tended to reduce the size of the farms, so that many of them are utterly inadequate to support the growing family. Very often, in cases of this kind, some of the younger sons have to go afield and earn their living in a variety of ways, or they rent farms from wealthy men who have invested their money in land and set up a home of their own.

With regard to tenant farmers the conditions under which they hold their farms are very different from those in the West. Their payment of rent is almost invariably made in kind. For example, when the time for the harvesting comes round, the landlord appears on the scene, and takes his seat on some convenient spot where he can watch the process. As soon as the rice is cut it is at once threshed and weighed. One half is handed over to the landlord, whilst the other is retained by the tenant. By this plan there is no dispute and no back rent always hanging like a shadow over the home.

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[1] Bean cake is the refuse of beans out of which the oil has been pressed. It comes from the north of China, where beans are largely cultivated. Both oil and this popular manure are largely exported to the southern provinces of the empire.

With regard to potatoes, the principle is the same, though they do not wait till they are ripe to make their division. The Chinese are in the habit of opening small holes in the ridges and of culling out the larger potatoes that may be big enough to be used for food for the family. This process goes on steadily up to the very time when the season has arrived for the whole to be dug up. If the family is a poor one, it will be found that very few have been left in the field, and these the smallest and least valuable. To meet this contingency, custom has settled that one ridge belongs to the landlord and one to the tenant. Each party can thus look after his own interests, and abstract from his own ridge the potatoes that are growing in it.

Taro and beans come under a different regulation. In the former case, as more manure is needed for its cultivation, one root in four is assigned to the landlord, but with regard to beans, the produce is equally divided as in the case of rice, but the landlord has to provide the seed. Everything outside of these four crops that the tenant may plant belongs to him for his own special use.

Wheat, barley, and all kinds of vegetables are his own particular property that the landlord can lay no claim to.

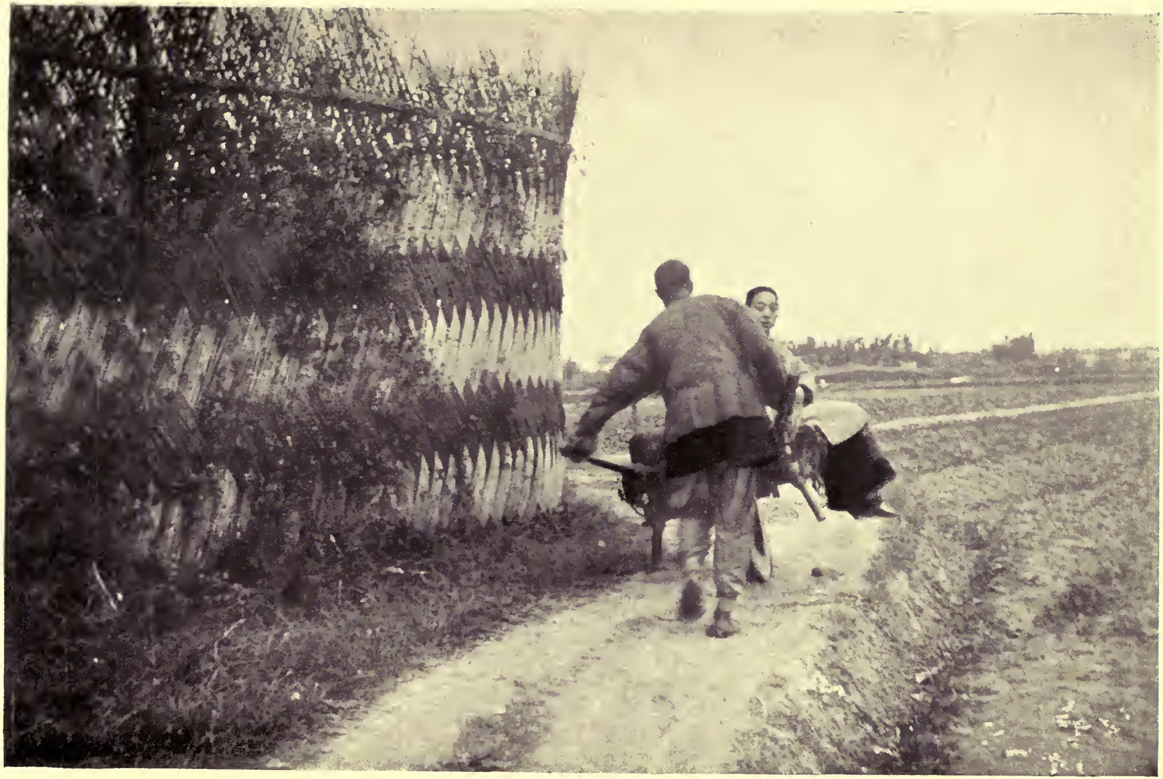
The above system seems on the whole a very admirable one, since it has fostered a friendly feeling between landowners and their tenants. The two parties are really partners on very equitable terms in the working of the land. If the year is a good one, the landlord looks with delight upon the heavy crop of rice, as it gleams in its watery bed, and equally so does the farmer, who mentally reckons, every time he looks at the grain that rustles in the breeze, how much he will be able to sell after reserving enough for the consumption of his family. If the year is a bad one, and the ears are mildewed or blasted, the tenant knows that he will not be harassed for rent at the quarter-day, no matter how poor the ingathering has been. Tenant and landlord bear the loss equally, and together they hope for better times in the future. It is for this reason that one hears so little of class differences in China. Landlord and tenant live side by side in the utmost harmony, and no secret combinations of the latter exist for the purpose of avenging the wrongs done by the former. Agrarian laws for the protection of the land-owners do not exist on the statute-books of this or any other of the preceding dynasties. The rich landlord and the poor tenant are bound to each other by common interests and need no legislation for their mutual protection.

CHAPTER XXI

HIGHWAYS AND BYWAYS

CHINA is a country that, looked at from a civilised point of view, or indeed from any other standpoint, has no roads. Both the Government and the people have in a large measure handed over the business of road-making to Nature, and as we are well aware of her æsthetic tendencies, her work has more of an ornamental character than a strictly substantial and enduring one. In various parts of the empire, there are evidences that centuries ago there were really magnificent roads that joined important cities and commercial centres. These were paved with slabs of stone that remain to the present day, though worn smooth and thin by the countless millions of feet that have travelled over them. Nature has disapproved of these formal highways, and has been doing her best by rain and storm, by weeds and grasses, and by wild flowers and shrubs, to make them fall into line with the beauties of the world around them.

There is one singular feature about the roads of China. They are public only in the sense that every one uses them. They have never been purchased by any one and then handed over to the community for public use. In some early time people found that the nearest way to a particular place lay along a certain route. They streamed along it. They trod it down and beat it into ruts. The farmers to whom the land belonged silently relinquished their rights to it, and in the course of time the travelling public calmly assumed that it belonged to them. Such is the process by which the roads in this country have come into existence. The whole of the roads of China are roughly divided by the Chinese into " small " and " great." The former



A COUNTRY RIDE ON A WHEELBARROW.

constitute the immense bulk of the roads in the empire and are simply footpaths that lead from village to village and hamlet to hamlet, and wind and bend according to the lie of the farms from which they have originally been abstracted. Sometimes, when the land is barren and unworkable, the road will be several yards in width, but when it runs through loamy soil, where crops can easily be produced, it narrows to a foot or a foot and a half.

Passing through the country on a wet day, one becomes painfully aware of the wretched character of these Chinese roads. The rain, perhaps, is falling steadily and the path winds amongst the nodding stalks of rice that bend gracefully over the pathway. It is but a foot in width, and even in fine weather it requires considerable steadiness of foot to avoid falling over into the slimy mud of the fields. But now it is slippery and treacherous with the wet. Here and there, too, a piece through wear and tear is actually under water. There is nothing for it but off with shoes and stockings and wade through the soft, sticky mire, till we ascend a rising ground where the water cannot reach. These roads from the very nature of the case are consistently circuitous and winding. A village, for example, is seen in the distance a mile away. To get to it fully a mile and a half will have to be traversed. A Chinese never objects to this, for it accords exactly with the character of his own mind, which never in any consideration goes straight to a point, but always in a roundabout, oblique manner. Besides, a straight road to a village would, it is universally believed, constitute a positive danger to it and its people, since it would enable the evil spirits that are always prowling about with some treacherous purpose to walk right into it, whereas a winding path bothers and perplexes them so that they finally lose their way and wander off somewhere else.

All the " small " roads in the kingdom are of the character just described. The green lanes and hawthorn hedges with their fragrant blossoms in spring, and vines and wild flowers and clinging clematis in summer, that form so attractive a feature in English scenery, are absolutely unknown in the greater part of this vast country. The people are too poor to allow of any waste of land for æsthetic purposes. The barest possible margin that will serve the passing traveller is all that is allowed to be wrung from the crop-producing areas. In this respect the rural population is hundreds of years behind that of England. The result is that ignorance and superstition and the crudest ideas are everywhere prevalent amongst all classes of the Chinese. It is amusing to watch the face of a country bumpkin when you tell him that an Englishman's head grows in precisely the same place as that of a Chinese. He has firmly got the impression that all wisdom and all sense are to be found only in China, and that they do not exist outside the Celestial Empire. There is no doubt that poor roads, and the absence of roads where they ought to exist, are in a large measure responsible for this. True enlightenment in a nation is impossible where the roads are a farce, and where the people, out of contempt for other countries, have barred their gates and built high their walls to keep out aliens. China's step in the progress of the world has been stayed by bad roads and by exclusiveness.

Outside of these small roads there is the system known as the "great roads." They are distinguished by this name, not because there is generally anything in their construction to make them deserve it, but because they are main thoroughfares, along which countless masses move every day in the year. In this sense they may truly be called great, otherwise one who has often used them could without any departure from the truth term them "great humbugs," "great failures," or even worse, according to the temper he happens to be in at the time. The existence of a great road depends entirely upon the amount of traffic that is carried on between one province and another, or between particular cities that are famous for the production of any special article of merchandise. As far as possible they run in straight lines, thus imitating the old Roman roads. The reason for this is obvious. The engineers and surveyors, in the first instance, were not scientific men who marked them out with chain and compass. The real layers-out of the roads were the coolies with burdens on their shoulders, who naturally took the shortest route, and preferred to mount a hill rather than increase their toil by making a long detour around it. The crow was to them an emblem of wisdom, which they never forgot in the laying out of their roads.

But let me describe a bit of one of these "great roads." In one sense it is a truly great one, for it runs from Peking in the far north-east to Canton in the extreme south-west, for two thousand miles or more. And when I drop my readers down upon it the first question they will ask is, "Where is the road?" I point to the place where they are standing, and I say, "You are now right on it," and, pointing to the moving figures that stretch away on each side into the far distance, I tell them that those are the travellers who are walking along the great road upon which they now are. The only sign that we are on the great road is the fact that a few feet in the centre are worn bare, and that constant streams of people are passing and repassing us on it. It is here about four feet wide, and is hard and firm simply because it is on a rock foundation, for we do not see a sign that art has ever stirred a finger in the making of it. We move along, amidst fields that, without hedge or fence of any kind, come up to the very edge of the road. We skirt little hills and journey over stone pathways three or four feet in width, with rice-fields submerged in water on each side, and still we keep hoping that the really broad and substantial highway will soon be reached, but it never comes in sight for the simple reason that it does not exist. By and by we reach a village, embowered amidst magnificent trees that overhang the road and cast a perfect shadow across it. This is one of the recognised halting-places that abound on every great road, where travellers and burden-bearers can get refreshment. They lie about a mile from each other, and are an unspeakable boon to the weary and tired travellers that pass along. The houses facing the street have been turned into eating-houses, where rice and sweet potatoes, hot and steaming, can be had at a moment's notice. Square tables have been placed in front of them, and on these are piled little heaps of ground nuts, also chopsticks and bowls appetisingly laid out, so as to tempt the passers-by to linger and use them.

Let us sit down at one of these alfresco tables to take a slight lunch, or, as the Chinese more poetically say, " a repairer of the soul." We grasp the chopsticks and hold up a hand curved into the shape of a bowl, when, without a word, the owner of the shop places in it a small basin filled with smoking rice that he has just scooped out of an iron rice-pan that is constantly kept on the boil. Little saucers that lie permanently on the table for the use of customers contain pickled cucumber, bean curd, or red salted turnip, and from these, as our eyes wander over them, we deftly pick out with our chopsticks delicate bits from any or all, to act as a seasoning to the somewhat tasteless rice. We finish up with a small heap of ground nuts, which we leisurely crack, and which act as a mild kind of dessert, and for the whole we pay six cash, no tips ever being given or expected from any one at these alfresco restaurants.

The place we have selected is a pleasant one to loiter at for a few minutes, for the boughs of a great banyan stretch across the road, and their luxuriant foliage protects us from the sun's rays that play amongst the leaves and here and there in tiny golden streamlets flash on the pathway beneath. Besides, the view we get of human life, with the pains and sorrows of the men that pass along this great artery, where the sound of footsteps never ceases the livelong day, is a rare one. To the great majority it is a veritable treadmill, where human strength and human endurance are tested to their very utmost. The crowd that moves like a living panorama before us is a varied one. There are pedlars, hucksters, and farmers with the hall mark of the sun dyed in brown on their faces, and with a peculiar list in their gait caused by the severe use of the hoe in their fields. There are mandarin messengers, with official hats and proud and haughty looks, carrying dispatches to a city twenty miles away. There are scholars, too, with the literary air upon them that shines through poor and shabby clothes and through shoes that are kept from falling to pieces only by the most careful nursing.

But the men that most predominate on this dusty, wearisome road are those whose hearts seem to be breaking through the severe toil they have to endure in order to earn a living that will barely keep body and soul together. And here is an instance of what I mean. A man comes staggering along under a burden that is positively oppressive. He is a strong, vigorous-looking young fellow, between twenty and thirty, and as fine a specimen of a man as one could meet with in this land of workers. His face is flushed and he breathes hard as he drops his load in front of where we sit, with the air of a man utterly exhausted. "What is the weight of your load?" I ask him. "One hundred and eighty pounds," he replies, as he wipes the perspiration that is running down his cheeks. "But why do you consent to carry so heavy a burden?" I again inquire of him. "I am compelled to do so," he at once answers, "for if I make it any lighter I shall have no money to take home to my family. I am paid by the pound weight, and if I reduce the pounds I at the same time reduce my earnings, and my home will suffer. Ah! it is a hard world," he continues, "and a carrier like me has to endure a great deal of suffering to earn an honest living."

Whilst we are talking, a sedan-chair comes in with a rush. It is borne by two men who seem thoroughly worn out. The front man is utterly distressed. His face is flushed as though he had a high fever. His lips are bloodless, and he has an overtaxed look about him as though he could no longer endure the strain that is crushing the very life out of him. The rear man lets the poles slowly slip to the ground, whilst the other takes them from his hot, blistered shoulders with a look of pain as though he were tearing off his skin. Without a word he staggers to one of the tables and drops into a seat. After a moment's rest, he stretches out his hand, gracefully curved into the shape of a bowl, and the observant attendant, who has had his eye upon him, promptly fills it with a basin heaped with steaming rice. There is a rapid and graceful movement of the chopsticks, and the contents of the bowl disappear at an amazingly quick rate. The colour comes back to his lips, and the weary look vanishes from his face.

Before he has finished the basin smiles flash over his features, and his merry bursts of laughter send their echoes down the road. After a few whiffs of a bamboo pipe that he always carries inserted in his waistband, the sedan is once more shouldered, and the men swing along under the spreading banyan out into the fiery road beyond.

Hardly has it passed out of sight before another halts in the place just vacated by it. Both the bearers are young, sturdy fellows, and we can see that though they are glad enough to get the chair off their shoulders, they would not confess that to any one, so they come in with a jaunty air and a dash of bravado, and toss the sedan to the ground as though it were a plaything. Then they wipe the perspiration from their faces, and begin to chaff some of the other bearers that raced in behind them, and soon peals of laughter and sallies of mother wit transform the place, till one forgets for a moment that the poor fellows are wearing out their lives in as severe toil as falls to the lot of workers in any part of the world.

As we pass on from this halting-place, we observe that wherever the road is level it does not vary much in its character. It is always poor, as, indeed, it must be considering that no one is responsible for keeping it in repair. When, however, we come to rising ground, we then discover into what a miserable state a great road may degenerate, and with what admirable patience the travelling public in China tolerates what in England would be the subject of public indignation until it was repaired and rendered fit for general use. Right in front of us we have an illustration of what a road may become when left to its own management. It is now a narrow ravine, fully twelve feet deep in the centre, with sloping banks on either side, from which, in the course of their disintegration by the wear and tear of past years, stones and miniature boulders have rolled into the middle of the narrowing gully. All the traffic has to pass along the very base of this, for the land on each side of the elevated banks is under cultivation and, consequently, may not be intruded on by the passing travellers. In wet weather this is most trying, and indeed even on fine days the poor chair-bearers have a hard time of it in carrying their fares through. As we are standing at this miserable pretence of a road, a sedan-chair is seen approaching the mouth of this gully. The fare is a stout, comfortable-looking Chinese, whilst the bearers are miserable anatomies, worn down by vice and opium-smoking, and apparently unfit to carry the big man in the chair even along the smoothest roads. They enter the ravine with mutterings and dark shadows on their faces, for they know by bitter experience exactly what they are going to meet. Uneasily they pick their way through the slush and mire, with sandals covered with mud and with language hot and sulphurous. The impediments they meet with are no common ones, that in a wider roadway they could dodge or circumvent. Here each one has to be met and conquered on the spot. But by and by they come to a small boulder that blocks the passage. As the foremost man comes up to it, he eyes it with an evil look. He glances hurriedly at each side of it to see if there is no way of escape, but there is absolutely none, for each side of it is barred with rubbish and sharp-pointed stones that make walking there an impossibility. There is nothing left for him but to mount the obstacle. With a shout to the hinder man he makes a dash at the stone, and by a mighty effort, he is on the top of it, and the chair like a rearing horse has thrown the fare on to his back. Another shout, with an imprecation on the mother of the stone, and he has descended from it, whilst the rear man is mounted on its top, and the man inside the chair has to hold on like grim death to prevent himself from being thrown head foremost into the slimy road in front of him. Another jump down, and the chair is once more even, and the men are panting and perspiring with the efforts they have made.

In spite of all the disadvantages of these roads, there are still many compensations to the man who has an eye for the beautiful, for very often, as he journeys along, his eye is rested by the rare sights in the country around that make him forget the miseries of the road over which he is travelling. Mountain ranges that seem to pile themselves against the sky, colossal peaks glistening like golden shafts in the sunlight, great deep valleys in which the shadows lie the greater part of the year, wide-spreading landscapes where winding streams flow amid rice-fields and under the shade of bamboo and banyan-trees, and hamlets embowered in woods, are some of the sights that may be seen from the lofty passes along which the road mounts, as it stretches towards its distant goal.

One of the most interesting things, however, that one now and again meets with on these wretched roads is the bridges. Our walk to-day will fortunately bring us to a very famous one, and from it we shall get an idea of the genius of the Chinese in building such. As we emerge from a long, straggling street, chiefly conspicuous for its slovenly, untidy look, and for the unkempt, unwashed appearance of its inhabitants, we suddenly come upon a scene of great beauty. Right in front of us stretches a stone bridge about a third of a mile in length that crosses an arm of the sea. Its natural picturesqueness has been intensified by the scenery that surrounds it. With the sunbeams sparkling on the water around it, and the waves sending their gentle showers of spray against the piers, it seems as though it might have been formed by fairy hands and placed here to make men forget for a brief space the pain and weariness they have to endure. On one side of the bridge rise high mountains that are bathed in sunshine, broken only by the great rifts in their sides where deep shadows slumber, whilst, on the other, the wide bay is dotted with islets, that seem to rise like sentinels out of the ocean to guard the bridge from the wild and impetuous waves that are often driven in by storm and tempest.

The bridge was built more than a thousand years ago. Before there was any bridge travellers had to cross in ferry-boats ; but this was so expensive to the porters, whose earnings were always slight, and it was, moreover, attended with so many risks, that a wealthy scholar determined to see that a bridge should be built that would be a perpetual memorial to his name, and at the same time a boon to all succeeding generations. It was a difficult undertaking, for it was not to be made in some secluded glen where it would be sheltered from storms and floods. Here the winds would rage against it with great force. The rising and falling tides would wash and scour around the foundations of the piers, whilst the waters around it, restless and moaning with the sound of the ocean in their voice, would search out every nook and cranny in its masonry. Deep and solid the great masses of stone were laid many feet below the bed of the ocean, and pier after pier rose in massive strength. The roadway was laid with huge slabs of stone that bound the piers one to the other, till at length the structure was complete, and it was opened for public use. The whole expense was paid out of the pocket of the original designer and out of subscriptions collected from all classes of people over a wide area, who were entrusted in carrying out this benevolent project. Its repair since then has been met by the contributions of the well-to-do, and has not fallen upon the Government.

The Chinese have some very peculiar ideas as to the rights that they claim to possess in the roads, and the liberty they assume to have to use them for their own private convenience. A man, for example, living in a crowded thoroughfare, only six feet wide, finds that his house, which abuts directly on the street, needs repairing. The whole front wall has to be taken down and rebuilt. He calls a mason and a carpenter and contracts with them to do the work. These proceed as calmly and as indifferently as though no public existed, and take possession of the road space in front of the house. The builder mixes mortar on it, and the carpenter planes his beams and planks close beside him. The street is turned into a veritable workshop, and no one ever dreams of considering what the public may say. The Chinese, being distinguished by the absence of nerves, and out of consideration of the fact that the householder had nowhere else to put his workmen, say nothing. The public come up to the heap of mortar, wet and sticky, that lies right in the centre of the road, gaze at it for a moment and then either jump over it, or cautiously edge their way around it. A sedan-chair approaches with a swing, and with a shout from the bearers "Give way! give way! we shall knock you down! stand aside! stand aside!" as a polite hint to the people in front to scatter to the sides, it fills nearly the whole available space of the street. How in the name of fortune is it to surmount this obstacle that lies like a barrier right across the way? The bearers come up, hesitate for an instant, and swear most profanely, but all in a pleasant tone. The front man gives a howl to the rear one, and makes a plunge and a jump that lands him on the outer edge of the wet compound, soiling his sandals and causing a fresh outburst of expletives that no modest person would wish to listen to. The after man does the same, and they proceed along the road grumbling and growling at what they would not for the world wish to have rectified.

Or again, it may happen that a shopkeeper's birthday comes round, and his family with one accord agree that the only worthy way to celebrate it is by having a play. His wife, beaming with smiles, declares that nothing will satisfy her but a play. The boys, with almond-shaped eyes glistening at the idea, jump for joy at the thought of having one all to themselves, and of thus becoming the envy of their playfellows. What a jolly time they will have looking at the antics of the actors, and listening to the deafening noise of drum and cymbal that take occasional fits of madness during the performance, when the pent-up feelings of the performers can find no other adequate means of expressing the deep emotions of their hearts. Arrangements are at once made with the chief of some Thespian band, and a popular play having been selected from the repertory that will ensure plenty of laughter, the stage is put up right in front of the shop door, blocking up the entire road and putting a stop to all traffic. Whilst the play is going on that particular section of the road cannot be used. Men with heavy burdens on their shoulders come up to the edge of the crowd that is convulsed with laughter at some side-splitting joke, and without a frown upon their faces turn back and by a considerable detour reach their destination. All classes recognise that a theatrical exhibition overrides all the rights of the public. It is only the mandarin that would attempt to interfere with it. Let but the sound of the gongs that herald his coming be heard, and at once the actors fly from the stage, and a hundred willing hands take it to pieces to let the "great man" pass.

But it is not simply these temporary blockings up of the highway that show the peculiar ideas that the Chinese have as to the ownership of the public roads. The rights of the public are further infringed upon by certain classes of people who seem to do most of their work upon the streets. The barber shaves his customers on the pathway. The peripatetic cook with his travelling restaurant chooses a corner where the hungry gather round him and, sitting on their heels, shovel down his delicacies with their chopsticks. The pork-butcher blowing his conch-shell takes up a prominent position on the street, and chaffers with his customers, whilst the passengers have to make their way around as best they may. In fact, carpenters, bricklayers, public letter-writers, old women who earn a precarious living by mending clothes, the travelling sweets-and-candy man and the whole host of peddlers, practically claim the highway as having been specially made for their convenience. But a change is beginning to dawn upon the spirit of the nation that in the near future will revolutionise the great roads at the very least. Telegraphs have been introduced, and their wires, teeming with invisible spirits, that hum and sing a language of their own, stretch from province to province, over high mountains, across boundless plains, and through lonely hamlets. Railroads, too, have been constructed in several parts of the empire, and the scream of the engine has startled the air, and given a new impulse to thought, and awakened men out of the long sleep of ages. There is a good time coming for China, and the weary, footsore traveller shall have rest, the sedan-chair shall vanish, and commerce and civilisation shall glide along the new roads that an awakened China shall have made.

CHAPTER XXII

BEGGARS

CHINA, looked at from a scenic point of view, is a remarkable country. Scenery as grand and as magnificent as can be seen in any other land is to be found in nearly every province of the empire. Ranges of mountains, fertile valleys, and mighty rivers that take their rise far away in the cloudland of the West, are the forces with which Nature, with her artistic hand, has fashioned the views and landscapes that abound throughout this great and magnificent country.

But it is not simply for its natural scenery that it is so distinguished. It is specially rich in all kinds of minerals. Its mountains contain within them vast deposits of coal, whilst hills, solid with iron ore, stare the people in the face and promise them boundless riches. It is a land where plenty should abound, did the people know how to transmute the riches that lie so thickly strewn throughout the land into gold and silver. Superstition, however, has laid its grim hand upon all this natural wealth and forbidden its development. The result is that the great mass of the common people suffer from extreme poverty, so that the daily question with large numbers is how they are to keep body and soul together.

That the struggle for existence is most acute is evidenced by the fact of the extreme thrift of the Chinese. It would be absolutely safe to say that there is no such thing as waste, especially of food, known in China. Everything is used up, everything is utilised, and what we would throw away, as not worth keeping, is here laid up for future use.

The Chinese makes a noble stand for independence, but the line between extreme poverty and beggary is frequently so narrow that the passage from one to the other is an exceedingly easy one. There are no poor-houses and no poor rates, consequently those who, through misfortune or vice, have lost their means of subsistence have to take to the beggar's wallet,[1] and depend upon the charity of the public for a miserable existence. The Chinese beggar appears to lead a roving, irresponsible life. He has no property and apparently no family ties. It would seem, therefore, as though it would be difficult for the law to take cognisance of his doings, but this is a mistake. The fact is he is under closer supervision than are the respectable and well-to-do in the community. The Chinese law is a dragon that keeps an eye upon all classes of society, but more especially upon those that might be dangerous to the State. The authorities, therefore, have appointed a headman whose special business it is to look after the beggars. He is supposed to know everything about them, and when the mandarins wish to inquire into any matter concerning them he is the person to whom they refer. The beggar is too unsavoury a character to be allowed to live within the limits of the town. The Chinese nose is an easy-going one, and can stand smells that would knock an ordinary English donkey down. A collection of odours, however, such as can be found in the beggars' camp is too much even for a Chinese. A camp, accordingly, is formed on some waste land, outside the town, not too near to offend the susceptibilities of the residents and not too far to make it difficult for the wretched men and women to go their rounds in its narrow streets and alleyways.

The Chinese beggar is, to my mind, one of the most wretched specimens of humanity in the empire. There is no mistaking the man. The English mendicant is, compared with him, a royal personage, who dresses magnificently and lives luxuriously. His Chinese confrère is very different from him. He comes out broadly and abruptly as a genuine beggar. Every feature about him is in the most hideous and realistic form, so as to touch the sympathies of the public.

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[1] The beggar's wallet, which is distinctive of his calling, is made out of a kind of matting. In this he stores the rice and broken bits of food that the benevolent give him.

The spectacle of a small family, dressed with scrupulous neatness, mutely appealing to the passers-by with a card that says, "We are starving," would excite only the laughter and scorn of every one who sees them. "What?" they would say, "beg with such clothes as these you have on! Why not sell them or pawn them, and use the money to start some huckstering business that would enable you to earn your own living?" The public heart would be as tightly closed against them as would the heart of the miser against those who sought to unloose his purse strings.

But let me describe a typical beggar. Here is one sitting by the roadside. He is a great, hulking fellow of about fifty. His clothes are in rags, but not in the general sense in which we are accustomed to use that word. His are literally in tatters, and how they manage to hang to each other is a mystery. It would seem as though the first blast of wind would scatter them like autumn leaves and leave the man as bare as a pair of tongs. How many dilapidated garments have gone to the making up of his wardrobe it would be impossible to tell. Colours intermix with colours and bits of cloth hang side by side the memory of whose ancestry must have long since faded away.

If the clothes are wretched, so is the human frame of the man they cover. His hair, instead of being neatly plaited, is matted and dishevelled. No comb could ever find its way through such a tangled wilderness. His face is coated with dirt. It lies in layers in the wrinkles and hollows of his face, whilst his hands are covered with a kind of scaly armour, composed of the same substance, that seems like an adaptation of Nature to protect him from the one thing that his soul abhors, viz., water. The most offensive thing, however, about him is one of his legs; this he thrusts out most ostentatiously before the passers-by, very much as a shopkeeper displays his wares to induce people to buy. A huge sore has eaten away nearly all the flesh from the front part of it. It is raw and bleeding, and the man points to it as you come near and, in the professional whine, tries to excite your sympathies.

It is a remarkable fact that with the Chinese beggar these diseases, which constitute his stock-in-trade, are always in the right place. They are never seen on the back of the legs, nor on other parts of the body that could not easily be exhibited to the public. They never seem to get either better or worse. In the summer days, when the great sun pours down his fierce rays, and bloated, vicious-looking flies swarm in clouds, it seems to make no difference to them. Again, when winter comes round and Nature tries her healing art to close the festering wounds she does so without any success. The cold north winds blow around him, but with no healing in their touch, and then he sits in some sheltered nook, shivering with cold, but, fortunately for him, the sore that brings him in the cash is as hideous as ever.

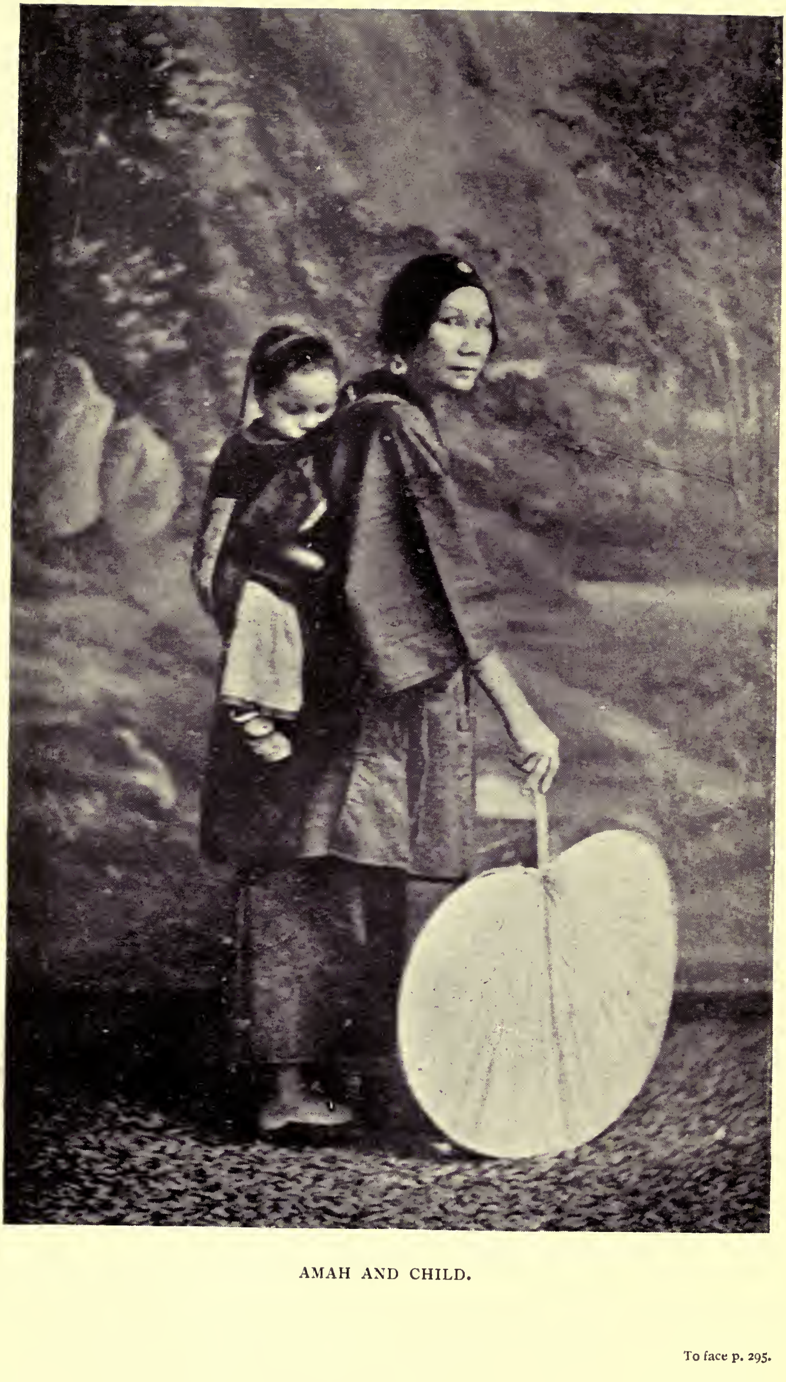
The begging fraternity is under the control of a head-man, to whom the mandarin has delegated very extensive powers. As it would interfere with the business of the shopkeepers to have the ragged crew pestering them during business hours and driving away customers by their presence, this man contracts with each of them for a monthly payment, which he collects from them. To show that such an engagement has been entered into he pastes the beggar symbol, viz., a gourd, over his door, as a sign that the house has been made free from beggars. Should a shopkeeper be so unwise as to refuse to pay this tax the head-man has a very simple remedy that will in one day bring him to his knees.

He merely intimates to his ragged army that they must carry on the negotiations themselves as he has failed, and to-morrow morning fifty or sixty of the wildest and most unkempt of the band will appear before the shopman's door. All business is simply at an end whilst they remain there. The narrow street is blocked, so that the passage to and fro is rendered difficult. As passers-by come up to the congested spot they avert their faces and hold their noses to avoid the odour from the unsavoury crowd.

All is noise and hubbub, for each beggar is holding forth on the misery of his lot and inveighing against the hard-hearted shopkeeper who refuses out of his abundance to perform an act of charity. Before many minutes have elapsed this unfortunate individual has come to terms and the agreement to pay the monthly tax has been made.

The gourd is at once pasted up, and the matter is thus far amicably settled. In order, however, to compensate the beggars for the trouble they have taken in paying him this friendly visit he gives each one a cash, which they receive with smiling faces, and in order to save the shopkeeper's face, they begin to praise him for his generosity, and with grim humour they declare that he brought them out to-day simply out of love for them and that he might personally make their acquaintance and bestow his gifts upon them.

The very poorest of the shopkeepers, who cannot afford to pay a monthly tax, are visited on the first and fifteenth of the month by a contingent of beggars, who get their pay from him in person. They come in a long string that winds in and out of the narrow streets like a serpent. They are a motley crowd, made up of the lame, the blind, and the halt, who usually are content to sneak their way along the streets in search of alms, but who to-day face the public with the look of men who have the right to do so. The line is headed by a sturdy, bold-faced rascal, who does the talking and disputing should there be any. His hair hangs disorderly about his face and escapes in loose tufts from his queue. His hands are black with the accumulated dirt of years, and his face has a fierce look upon it as though he felt he was in an enemy's land and must be prepared to fight his way through it. Immediately after him comes a man with a banjo, which he occasionally twangs just to make things pleasant. He is one of the musical class, and because of his long and varied experience, but chiefly because the spirit of music is in his heart, he cannot keep his fingers off the strings, and so he marches down the street to the sound of his own tune. Behind him is a blind man, whose left hand rests upon his shoulder. His very eyeballs have disappeared, and deep caverns show where they once were. He holds his face up to the sun as though he would catch the flash of his rays, to get, if possible, a glimpse of the world that is now hidden from his gaze. The face is a most piteous one to look at and we feel our sympathies drawn out towards him as he mutters to



AMAH AND CHILD.

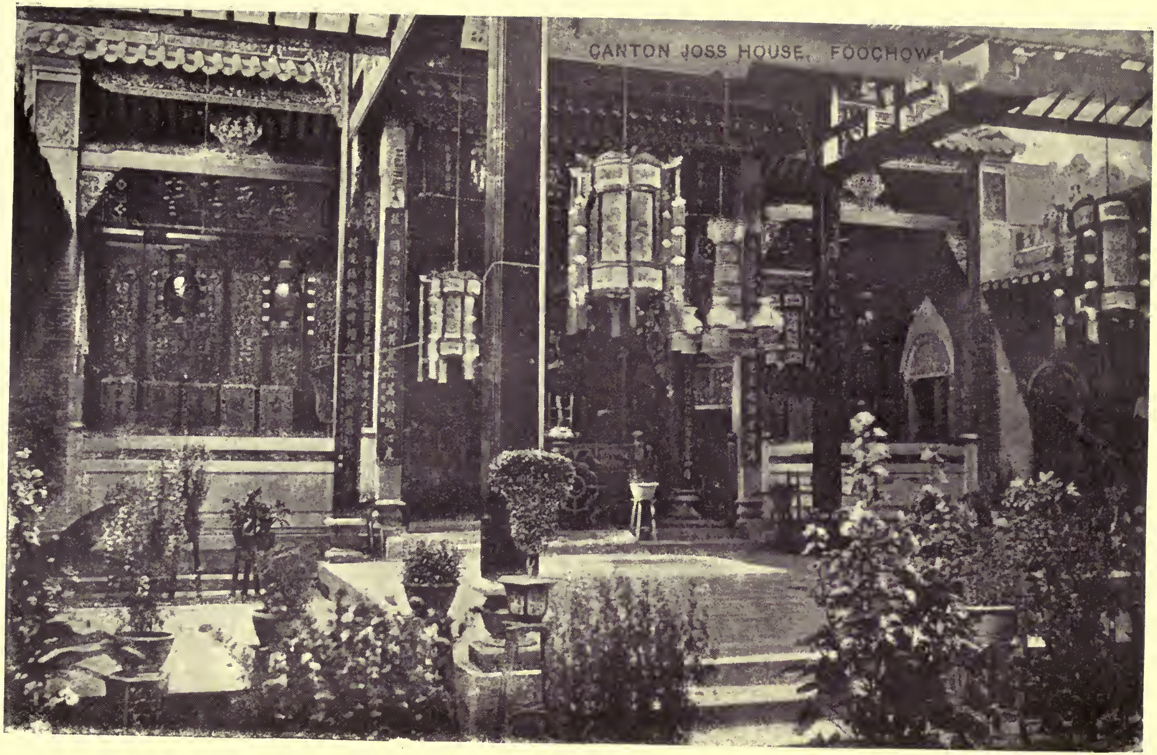
To face p. 295.

himself the time-worn sentences about his misery that he is accustomed to use to draw forth the charity of the benevolent. As each one comes up to the counter that always abuts on the street the shopkeeper stands waiting and gives him one cash. Without a word he passes on, quite satisfied, apparently, with a donation that venerable custom declares to be ample.

Besides this power of levying what is really a poor rate on the warehouses and shops of the town, the beggars have a number of recognised privileges which bring them in a certain income. For example, they are entitled to a fee on the occasion of a marriage. The size of this will depend upon the circumstances of the home where the marriage is to take place. The beggars seem to have an intelligence department of their own that gives them precise information as to every marriage that has been arranged, and the exact day and hour when it is to come off. If it is a well-to-do family, it will be prudent for it to arrange with the headman what the fee shall be, otherwise the most unpleasant results may be expected. Recently a wealthy man, well known for his parsimony, informed the headman that his son was going to be married, and offered a fee that was out of all proportion to his wealth. It was, of course, indignantly refused as utterly insufficient. A prolonged altercation ended in the rich man defying the headman to do his worst and declaring that there would be no advance upon the sum proffered him. The chief, accustomed to deal with the very worst elements of Chinese society, had learned by long experience not to lose his temper, so he replied : " Well, if you are determined not to give the amount I deem reasonable, I must leave it to others to arrange the matter with you." As he said this a smile crept over his grimy face, the corners of his mouth puckered up, and laughter lurked in his eyes, as though he had before his mind's eye a vision of the scene that would take place in the very midst of the wedding festivities.

The wedding day arrived. The bride had been carried in her crimson chair to her new home, and the friends and guests were full of mirth and rejoicing, when a shadow fell upon the sunbeams that were playing about the door. A beggar comedy was now about to be played, mainly for the amusement of the actors, who rarely had a chance of displaying their histrionic powers before so select an audience. The shadow on the doorstep was that of a woman of hideous aspect. Her hair was a perfect wilderness of disorder. Her face was a thoroughly bad one, and traces of dissipation were seen in the hard, coarse features, from which every womanly look had vanished. Her clothes, which hung about her in rags, told in eloquent language of the loss of character she had suffered. No touch of art was seen about them and no deft fingers had tried to arrange them, so that she should appear to the best advantage in the poor things in which she was clad. They were slovenly and untidy, and they seemed to have been pitched upon her as though it had never been a woman's duty to care how her things looked. Stepping boldly inside the courtyard, she began, in the mendicant whine, to ask for alms. The people tried to stop her and in loud and angry tones bade her begone. She never budged an inch, but went on calmly with her appeal, the only difference being that her attitude became more bold and her voice slightly more insolent. But soon the attention of the household is taken from the woman that begs so fiercely to other forms that appear at the door. A dissipated fellow in true beggar uniform walks boldly in and, in a loud voice, almost demands that something shall be given him. His face has a scowl upon it, which is rendered all the more forbidding by his hair falling in ragged tufts over his forehead and eyes, and giving him a bold and savage appearance.

Immediately after him came a blind man, led by two wan, emaciated opium-smokers, who guided the sightless man into the very room where the guests were assembled and where they joined in the loud clamour for alms. The guests began to be alarmed, but the stream of beggars has only just begun to flow. Men with ulcerated legs, and lepers with faces marred and blotched with unhealthy spots, and fingers twisted and turned into the palms, that never again could be straightened, and men with visages rendered disgusting and horrible by disease and the hardships of their life, march in as though the house were their own, and



CANTON JOSS HOUSE, FOOCHOW.

take up the cry that now fills the place with its deafening noise. It would seem, indeed, as though the whole of the beggars' camp had determined to attend the marriage festivities, for the number that press round the door and throng the street beyond, unable to get into the house, must be fully two hundred. It is a high festival for the beggars, for they are there by order of their king, and no law can touch them for what they are doing to-day. In the midst of all their revelry and noise they are careful to commit no act that shall bring their headman, who is responsible for their conduct, within the clutches of the law. No person is touched and not an article is stolen. They simply shout and whine and beg in every beggar tone they know, till the rich man and his guests are so horrified that a messenger is sent post haste to summon the headman to disperse the unruly rabble that have turned his house into a pandemonium. After a time he leisurely walks in with a twinkle in his eye and a dazed kind of look about his face as though he were astonished at being called in this summary way from his home. The rich man, who has lost "face" amongst his guests, begs him to dismiss his unsavoury subjects and eagerly promises to agree to the sum that had been demanded from him.

The headman is master of the situation, but he deals generously with his fallen foe, so with a wave of his hand, as potent as that of the most famous magician, he disperses the unruly and the ragged crowd of lepers; blind, diseased, and maimed gradually file off and leave the building to the wedding guests. The king then pastes his royal emblem over the door as an intimation to any of his people that might stray that way that the fees had been paid and the guests must not be disturbed.

Besides the regular and permanent fraternity of beggars there is another class that visits the town, but only occasionally. When they do come, however, they cause more commotion and more dissatisfaction than any equal number of the resident fraternity could possibly do. They are called the "wandering criminals," and are a special feature of this country, such as could be found in no other. The Chinese are an eminently business-like people and yet withal philosophical. There is nothing of the mystic about them, and their abstrusest thoughts always run into the practical. The fathers of the race laid it down as an axiomatic truth that no criminal should be an absolute burden on society.

We feed our prisoners with good, wholesome food and lodge them in spacious buildings. We provide doctors to look after their health and hospitals where they can be treated when they are sick. The Chinese do not believe in this. The criminal, they say, has wronged society; why, then, should society be still further punished by having to keep the evildoer in comparative luxury? A prisoner, therefore, in China, has to be fed either by himself or his friends. If he has no money and no friends, the mandarins will then allow him the merest pittance—that is, barely sufficient to keep body and soul together. If he gets sick, or dies, that is his business and does not concern the authorities. The Chinese have a very interesting way of dealing with offenders of the more criminal type. Instead of shutting them up in prison they are sometimes condemned to be banished to a distant province, where they must move ceaselessly about from place to place within it and beg their living as they go. It is a terrible sentence, but it is carried out without any expense to the State, for from the moment that they start on their long journey to the province where they are to expiate their crime till the time they have been sentenced to this wandering life is up they must support themselves by begging.

But let me describe these men. One day in passing through a crowded thoroughfare I came upon four of these "wandering criminals." Coming upon them suddenly, I was startled by their wild and savage aspect. They had the appearance of being a very bad type of men, that had suddenly sprung from the lowest slums of a great city and were ready for the commission of any crime. They clearly wanted to give the people an idea of their ferocity in order to hasten the flow of the cash they demanded from each shop. Their hair was not done up in the ordinary pigtail, but was allowed to hang disordered and uncombed at its own free will. Stray tufts fell down over their foreheads, and through these flashed the black, restless-looking eyes which seemed almost to strike terror into the occupants of the shop. Each one had one of his hands bound to his ankle by a loose, heavy chain, which he clanked ominously as if to hint that any resistance to his demands for money would end in a fierce and fatal onslaught. The methods of these men were very different from those of the ordinary beggar who whines out his request in the humblest tones, and who receives the insults that are hurled at him in the very meekest and the most submissive manner.

These "wandering criminals" spoke in loud and domineering tones and in a rough northern dialect that the people of the south did not understand. It was an unknown language, but the clanking chains, fiercely flashing eyes, and savage looks put a menace into the stormy language of the north that prevented the people from resenting this unusual onslaught on their pockets. Besides, every one knew that there would be no profit in resisting these scoundrels, for each man carried with him a permit from the local mandarin to solicit alms from the town, and so each hastened to fling them a cash and wave them off to the next door. These men seemed to be a positive danger to the town and to be outside of all law, but that was not so. They knew that they could bluster and shout and rattle their chains as much as they liked, but if they attempted to commit any overt act against any of the people the grip of the law would have been upon them in a moment. Certainly there did not exist a single policeman in the whole length and breadth of the city to apprehend them, and there seemed no one ready to defend law and order in case of a row. But still the law had its eye upon them all the time, for it was absolutely certain that on the outside of the crowd that surged around to look at these northern villains the Tipao, dressed like any ordinary coolie, stood carelessly by smoking his long bamboo pipe, ready at a moment's notice to intervene and drag them off to prison.

Besides the beggars above mentioned, there is a great variety of independent wandering poor that refuse to come under any general classification or to enrol themselves among the professed beggars of the district. Some of these endeavour to charm the cash out of the pockets of the benevolent by playing on musical instruments of the most primitive and unmusical type. One of these is an elementary fiddle of one string played by a single-stringed bow. Another is a hollow section of bamboo, struck with the first three fingers and producing a sound that reminds one a little of a drum. The third is simply two pieces of flat bamboo that are artistically made to flap against each other, with the result that a noise is made but very little harmony. If the public give any alms to the performers on the above inharmonious instruments, it must be simply to get rid of them and not because their souls have been touched into charity by the sweet influences of music.

A study of the beggar system is a most interesting one, and especially the exquisite art that enables the headman to extract from so wretched and miserable a body of men as they, not simply a competence that enables him to live with his family in comparative luxury, but also to build houses and buy lands that he may leave to his children. But those who have lived any length of time in China will not be surprised. The art of squeezing is one practised by every class in this great empire, from the royal household down to the beggar by the wayside. Even their headman has to share his gains with his immediate superiors if he would retain his office.

CHAPTER XXIII

"FACE"

"FACE" is one of the most potent, and at the same time one of the most amusing words in the Chinese language. It is not meant to describe the countenance of any one of the four hundred millions that inhabit this empire. It represents rather an idea that permeates the whole of society. It may be said to be the one dramatic element that makes every Chinese a play-actor, and his own life the stage on which he acts the farces and comedies that are constantly being played in everyday life. A Chinese is dominated by one passion, viz., to look well before his fellow-men. To do this successfully is to have "face." To fail, or to appear in disgrace, is to "lose face." He is well aware of the power of scenic effect, and so he is always arranging the play that he may give the onlooker the best view of himself. The spectators look on with faces as unmoved as though they were officiating at a funeral, though they know that the whole thing is a farce got up to produce a certain effect. To smile, or to let it appear that they saw through the thing, would spoil the effect, and cause the men to "lose his face."

Roughly speaking, this word "face" embodies two broad lines of thought, though these by no means exhaust the many possibilities that lie lurking within it. The first of these is honour, or reputation. A man, for example, has done some public service for which he has received high honours. His name has been printed in the *Peking Gazette*, which has carried the news of his achievements to the utmost limits of the empire. This man is said to have a large amount of "face," sufficient indeed to enable him to stand the gaze of the whole nation, as well as to cause the members of his clan in some out-of-the-way village in a distant province to have enough of the same article to last them for several generations to come. Some time ago, in a certain city in China, a mandarin came to the close of his term of office, and was about to leave to take up a position in another province of the empire. He was a man of marked ability and had gained the reputation of being a wise and efficient ruler, and less disposed to squeeze the people than is the habit with most gentlemen of his class.

It must not be inferred from this that he was immaculate as regards the taking of bribes. No one ever dreamed that he was. He had bought his office for ten thousand dollars and, of course, he had to get back that amount again. No Chinese would think the less of him for doing that. He had besides to lay by a comfortable little sum to transmit to the paternal home, so that when he retired from the cares of high office he could do so with the dignity that the knowledge of a competence awaiting him would enable him to sustain. From a Chinese point of view this was most reasonable and just. Outside of these honest gains, he had never been known to show an exacting spirit. Other men who had preceded him had been distinguished for their rapacity. Justice and mercy had been ruthlessly set aside in the one passion for enriching themselves. This man had shown that the main aim of his life had been the administering of justice and the promotion of the welfare of his people.

It was, therefore, determined to give him a parting gift that would show the high appreciation in which he was universally held and at the same time give him such an amount of " face " as would serve him for the rest of his life. The present that the people decided to give him was the " umbrella of the myriad people." As the title indicates, this was a gift that lay within the prerogative of the people only to give. The Emperor might bestow the most splendid honours upon him, but he could not give him that. His superiors might desire to show their appreciation of his integrity as a mandarin, but they could never present him with a gift that every official longs to have given him. As it represented the affection and loyalty of thousands who had been benefited by his rule, of course, it could come from no other source than from them. This umbrella is made of crimson silk. It is of huge proportions, and when it is opened a curtain of about two feet in width falls gracefully all round it, on which are inscribed in black velvet letters the names of the leading men who have been active in getting up the presentation. The one presented on this occasion, in addition to such names, contained but a single sentence, brief but pathetic, "He protected us because he loved us."

And now the hour of the mandarin's departure arrives. The whole yamên was in one delightful state of excitement. The secretaries and runners, and the numerous followers that gather round the courts of the mandarins, seemed unable to control themselves. The myriad people had flocked in crowds to see the last of their beloved ruler, and the narrow streets in the vicinity of the yamên were densely packed with a living mass that made them impassable to the public. The one conspicuous thing, however, that stood out prominent above everything else in that living scene, was the crimson umbrella flashing in the sun and held high by the sturdy arms of some of the myriad people. A special band stood by to escort it to the river, where the mandarin's boat was waiting to receive him. No sooner had he got into his sedan-chair and it was lifted on to the shoulders of the bearers than the band, as if conscious how much depended on them, broke into wild strains that filled the air of the immense courtyard, and travelled over the heads of the crowds outside, till they were lost in the city beyond.

The scene was one in which the Chinese are seen at their best. The mandarin's face, usually stern and impenetrable, glowed with a tender and benevolent expression. Countless faces beamed with smiles, black eyes sparkled with excitement, and pent-up feelings were expressed in orientally poetic language at the loss of so virtuous a ruler. As the procession wound its way through the city fresh crowds constantly gathered from alleyways and side streets. The band, as if reflecting the glory of the mandarin and the crimson umbrella, seemed to think that the success of the day depended upon them. The men's cheeks were distended like miniature balloons as they blew into their instruments and sent out wild and weird notes that filled the air, now with shrieks of despair and anon with bold and martial strains. It was indeed a joyous day, and men whispered to each other as they watched the procession and saw the gleam of the rich-coloured umbrella, "What face he has got to-day! He must be a happy man indeed and proud will his friends be when he tells them the story of to-day."

And happy indeed was this solitary figure, that etiquette compelled to sit alone, without daring to share his thoughts with any one. It was a red-letter day in his history. The crimson umbrella that cast its shadow over his chair danced before his vision as the emblem of all that was beautiful. It was the one thing that would be for ever permanent in his life. The crowds that gazed upon him would vanish, the music die away, and his memories of the city where he had been so highly honoured would fade, but the umbrella would always remain with him. He would take it home with him and put it in the ancestral hall of the clan, and there, amidst the spirits of his forefathers, it would perpetuate his memory after he was gone.

Another idea contained in the word "face" is self-respect, or dignity, a thing that a Chinese must maintain at all costs and in all circumstances. Whether he is right or wrong he must never be placed in a position where he would have to blush for himself. His "face" must be maintained at all costs.

A coolie, for example, hears that his foreign employer is dissatisfied with him and is on the point of dismissing him. He at once concocts some plausible story that completely mystifies his master and hands in his resignation. The latter, who is only a barbarian, does not see the point, and as he never dreams that he has any "face" to save in the matter, he is only too glad of the chance that rids him of an utterly untrustworthy servant. The man goes out with his countenance covered with smiles, for though he has lost his situation, he has saved his "face." For the next two or three days he makes a kind of triumphal march amongst his friends. One of these meets him and says, "Oh!

by the way, I hear you are not living with So-and-so now." "No," replies the man, with a countenance like that of a judge, "I could not stand him any longer. He has no manners, and no refinement, and I felt I was hurting my own character by remaining with him, so I resigned. He begged and entreated me to stay, and he even offered to increase my wages ; but money, you know, is not everything, and so I left him." "Of course you could not do anything else," the friend says, and they look at each other with solemn faces as though they were both in earnest, which they are not. The friend is not deceived. He knows that the other is acting a little comedy to save his "face," and with the instinct of a Chinese he enters into the spirit of it, and acts as though he were being completely deceived.

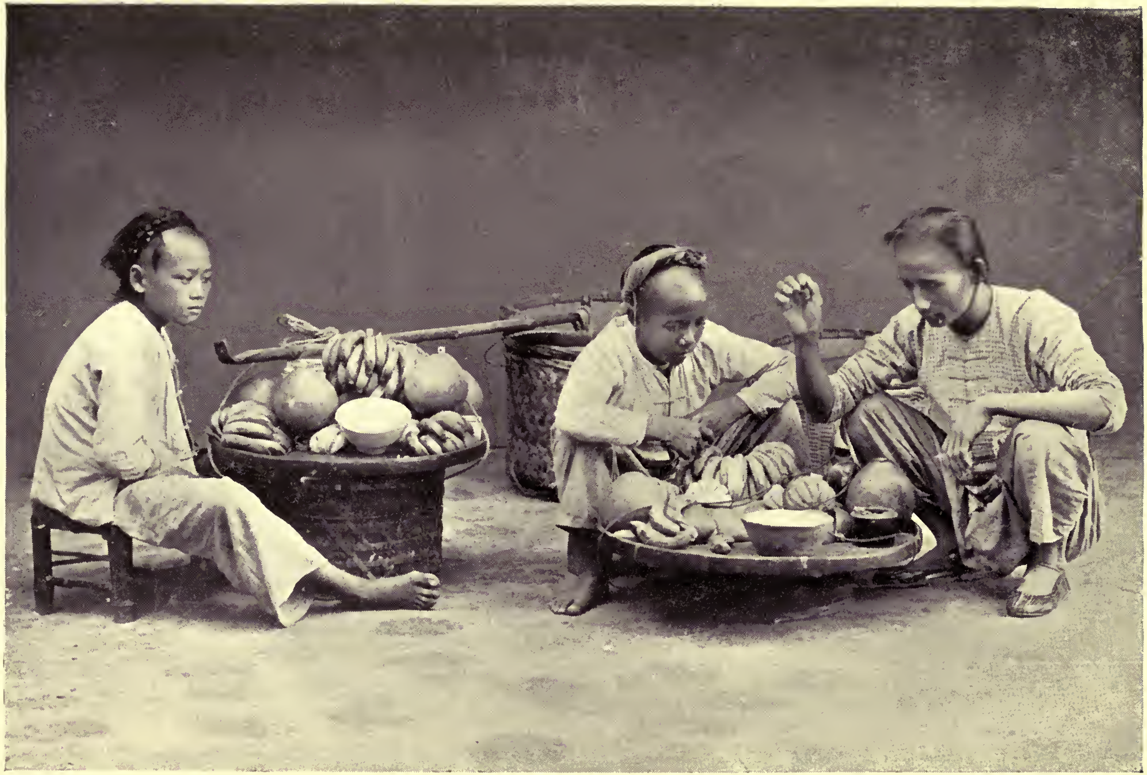
In order to "save one's face," the oddest and most laughable devices are often resorted to when without them the "face" would inevitably be lost. One of these is ludicrous in the extreme, and could have been invented only in China. A rich man, for example, has committed some offence against the law. The mandarin has issued his warrant and commanded him to appear in his court on a certain day to be tried. He is so conscious of his wrong that he is perfectly certain that before the case has proceeded far he will be thrown on his face and slippered by one of the court runners. This, of course, would be an immense indignity and he would lose his "face" for ever amongst his friends. But money is all-powerful in China, and society has devised ingenious methods by which the man who possesses it may go through life with an untarnished face. When he reaches the door of the yamên, on the day of the trial, a number of men who are lounging about gather round him, and offer him their services. These are persons who get their living by receiving the lashes that ought to be inflicted on others. For them to be beaten will bring no loss of "face." They have committed no crime ; they are simply earning an honest livelihood, and after the process is over they leave the court without a stain upon their character. The rich man bargains with one of these. For so many stripes he will give him so many thousand cash. He then enters the yamên with the calmness of a man who is conscious of his innocence. The one who is really to suffer is the man with the hang-dog expression who sneaks behind him, keeping slightly in the background, as his employer speaks a few hurried words to the policeman who is on duty, and who has also to be bribed to allow the use of a substitute.

Now the real farce begins. The rich man kneels before the mandarin, who in a stern and serious voice expatiates upon the heinous nature of the offence he has committed. Finally, he orders the runners to bastinado the man with their bamboo rods. No sooner has this command been given than the rich man, rising quickly from his knees, deftly stands aside whilst the man he has engaged is thrown violently on his face and the swish of the bamboos as they play their part and the loud cries of the sufferer are the only sounds to be heard in the court.

There is no attempt in all this at concealment. Both the runners and the mandarin know that the man that is writhing on the ground is not the culprit. What does it matter? Justice is being done by proxy at least. The rich man will suffer through his pocket. A good many of his surplus dollars will eventually find their way, by a circuitous route, into the pockets of his Excellency himself, and in the end he will find that the "saving of his face" has been a very expensive affair for him.

"Face" is such a universally diffused idea in China, that men frequently associate it with many things outside of human life, and they are careful that no indignity shall be done to them, so as to cause them to "lose face" with the general public. The yamên is one of these things. It is the residence of the mandarins, who are the embodiment of the power and the authority of the Emperor. It is the fountain of appeal in cases of oppression or wrong, and it is the emblem of law that protects society. It is, therefore, important that its dignity shall be severely maintained and its prestige be kept up in the eyes of the people.

In order to understand what is meant, it will be necessary to explain that just inside of the gates of



FRUIT-SELLERS.

The two on the right are gambling with the dice that are being thrown into the bowl.

the yamên a large drum is suspended in the air. In ancient times a wise Emperor, who knew the character of the mandarins and the difficulty of getting quick justice, commanded that every yamên in the empire should have one of these. In cases of emergency or great peril, where the slow processes of law would not avail, a man was permitted to come and strike this drum. The mandarin was then bound, at any hour of the day or night, to come out and listen to the complaint. This, of course, is contrary to the usual dignified course of things, and so far the yamên may be said to "lose its face" by being divested for the time being of the awe and terror with which the popular mind has invested it. In order, therefore, to restore its damaged prestige, it is the custom for the mandarin, before he listens to the story of the man who has taken liberties with his court, to have him gently slippered. This levels up things, and restores any "face" that may have been lost.

The "face" of to-day is of no mere modern origin. It existed in the earliest days of Chinese history. It is related that a king in the famous Chow Dynasty discovered that his prime minister was in the habit of receiving presents of silk, as bribes. He did not wish to punish him, for his services were needful for him, and yet he wished to cure him of his fault, but in such a way that he might "save his face," and so be able to retain him in his service. He thought of a plan that succeeded admirably. One day he sent him a large number of pieces of silk as a present. When the minister came to thank him for them, he expressed his surprise that he had given him such a magnificent gift. "I heard," replied the prince, "that you were fond of receiving such presents, and so I thought I would gratify you by begging you to accept one from me." The minister felt at once that he had been found out, but the rebuke had been administered in so kindly a way that he knew he was forgiven. His "face," too, had been saved, so that he could still remain in the service of the king.

It would have been well for our diplomatists if they had appreciated what a tremendous factor this "face" is in the national life. It might have prevented the decay of English prestige in this country, and the terrible outbreak of war with Japan, that has so humiliated this empire, and destroyed its "face" for many generations to come. The great statesmen of China were filled with resentment because, when the Japanese threatened to march on Peking during the late war, England did not interfere and save the "face" of the nation. Li Hung-chang became one of the most violent opponents of England because, in China's extremity, she did not step in and intervene between her and her successful enemy, but left it to Germany, France, and Russia to carry out a duty that China looked to Great Britain to perform.

There is one redeeming feature about this passion for saving one's "face" that lifts it up from the common selfish level that we are apt to attribute to it. In a larger outlook at it we find that it is not an entirely personal thing that is always exercised to preserve one's own dignity or act to save oneself from appearing in a false or invidious position. This national trait has had the effect of cultivating a delicate and refining influence in the feelings of the people for each other. Whilst men are sensitive about anything that would cast the slightest shadow upon their own face they seem to be keenly alive to the importance of saving their neighbour's also from any shame that might cover it with shame and confusion. A case in point will illustrate what I mean.

In one of the country churches under my charge, the preacher or evangelist in charge had become thoroughly unpopular. He was a miserable speaker, without the slightest atom of poetry or imagination about him, and his sermons were a dull level of the most commonplace and uninteresting character. Socially, too, he was a complete failure. He did not know how to talk. He could not tell a story or show in his conversation that his heart was touched to any human sympathy of any kind whatsoever. He was as dull a man as any one could conceive of. He finally became so unpopular that his congregation determined to get rid of him. But how to do this was a question that was not so easily answered. A notice to quit was not to be thought of, for that would make him "lose face." To stop the supplies was also an expedient that would have the same effect, and therefore was dismissed as being inapplicable. Many plans were suggested, but as each of them, if carried out, might endanger his "face" they were all successively rejected, and the leading men appealed to me to take the matter in hand and devise some scheme to relieve the church of a man who was thoroughly out of touch with them. This was anything but easy for me, for I could not take any action that would "deprive him of his face," and thus fill the man with confusion or render it difficult for him to get another charge.

After arranging with another church to have him as their preacher, I finally got him to resign, and I then took an early opportunity of publicly informing his people that their preacher, for reasons that need not be discussed, had come to the conclusion that he must relinquish his charge over them, and that, therefore, they must look out for some one else to be their teacher and instructor. To watch the countenances of the people when this decision was announced was as good as a play. They seemed perfectly stunned, and amazement sent its varying emotions flashing across their features. By and by protests were made and entreaties put forth that the preacher should withdraw his resignation. If I had not been behind the scenes and had not known the exact feeling of the church I should have been deceived and should have joined with them in persuading him to listen to the urgent solicitations of his people, but I did not ; on the other hand, I announced that the resignation was a final one and could not on any account be reconsidered. After a time the voices of entreaty died down, and it was finally accepted as a settled thing that the position of preacher in that church was vacant.

Now, these people could not be entirely convicted of hypocrisy. The little by-play that day had as its motive the very beautiful one of striving to save the feelings of a man whose ministrations had become utterly distasteful to them. They might have brutally handed over to him the balance of his salary and told him that his services were no longer required. That would have been to crush him and to have given him a reputation in the churches that would have covered him for years, perhaps, with shame. They wanted to preserve the man's own self-respect and so they took this oblique way of carrying out their purpose.

But the story did not end with that day's performance. About a week after, the servant came into my study and told me that the leading men and the preacher of this very church wished to see me. I naturally wondered what such a visit meant. After they were seated and we had passed the compliments of the day with each other, I politely asked them what was the particular business they wished to discuss with me. One of the most influential amongst them began by telling me that they had been very uneasy in their minds about the loss of their preacher. The whole church, indeed, had been in a most perplexed and unhappy condition ever since he had resigned and they had come specially to consult with me to see whether I could not persuade him to reconsider his decision and listen to their earnest request to remain with them as their pastor.

One by one the others followed in the same strain and employed the strongest arguments possible to get me to use my influence with the man to cause him to withdraw his resignation. I was perplexed and did not know what to do. These very same men had only very recently used all their powers of persuasion to induce me to find some way by which the man could be got rid of. I had done so and now here they were, with the man whom they really detested in their midst, eloquently going over the reasons why he should be retained in his old position. Fortunately for them, I absolutely refused to listen to their arguments, and the preacher seconded me by declaring that he had made up his mind to accept another invitation which he had received from another church to become their minister. After a few words on other subjects, he got up and left as he had an appointment to keep. As the door closed upon him I turned to the others and I said very sternly: "Will you please tell me what you mean by your strange conduct? You were determined in the first instance to get rid of your preacher, and in sympathy with you I arranged a very unpleasant piece of business so satisfactorily that everybody's 'face' was saved, and now you are here begging and entreating for the retention of the very man that you could not tolerate. What is the meaning of this farce?"

The men up to this point had kept their faces as solemn as judges. There had not been a quiver of the eyelids or a passing flash across their features to indicate that a huge comedy was being enacted. One of the most solemn-looking of the men before me, with a twinkle in his eye and a smile that seemed to come from some great depth within the recesses of his heart, looked up at me and said: "It is quite true that we wished to get rid of the man, and he himself was perfectly aware of that. It would not do, however, to let the world assume that this was the case. To have done that would have caused him to lose his face so seriously that he would not have recovered it for many a long year to come. Now he leaves us with a large accession of face and the story will be repeated in the church to which he is going, and the man will be able to hold up his head in a manner that he has never been able to do before." As he slowly uttered these words, the smile became deeper and deeper till it spread all over his face and his eyes twinkled with an irrepressible sense of humour. The countenances of the others, too, showed how tickled they were at the comedy they had been playing. They were suffused with broad grins that travelled over their ample faces and over their foreheads till they vanished down their queues. Their amusement was so contagious that I found myself joining in the hearty laughter that filled the room with its echoes.

The Chinese is a man with an inexhaustible fund of humour. Without that he would not have been able to have borne the toil, the hunger, the sorrows, and the thousand sources of trouble that, without one little ray of light flashed down upon him from heaven, he has had to endure. It has been like the brook tumbling down the mountain-side and singing its song amidst the hills, or like the rainbow that, amid gathering clouds that are darkening the very heavens, illumines the gloom with its beauty and makes one forget that the world at its worst can never lose its brightness.

Now amidst all the endless possibilities for exhibiting this beautiful and God-given sense, there is nothing that gives such boundless opportunities as this most interesting and universal custom. The oddities of the Chinese mind and their keen appreciation of the whimsical in the human mind find a vent in it such as nothing else could supply. It is a pleasing thought that in their effort to carry out an idea that is a purely selfish one originally, the Chinese have been led during the course of ages to widen its scope and to include the "face" of others as well as that of their own.

CHAPTER XXIV

PEEPS INTO CHINESE LIFE

BROTHER JOHN is one of the unsolved problems of the East. A Chinese puzzle is popularly supposed to be the most intricate and perplexing of its kind. It has a delightful air of mystery about it. It is involved. Subtle points of difficulty lie hidden in unexpected places. Angles and corners exist that will not fit anywhere, and yet without these the puzzle would be incomplete. This complicated bit of workmanship, and its cunning and apparently impossible combinations reveal the nature of the mind that designed it.

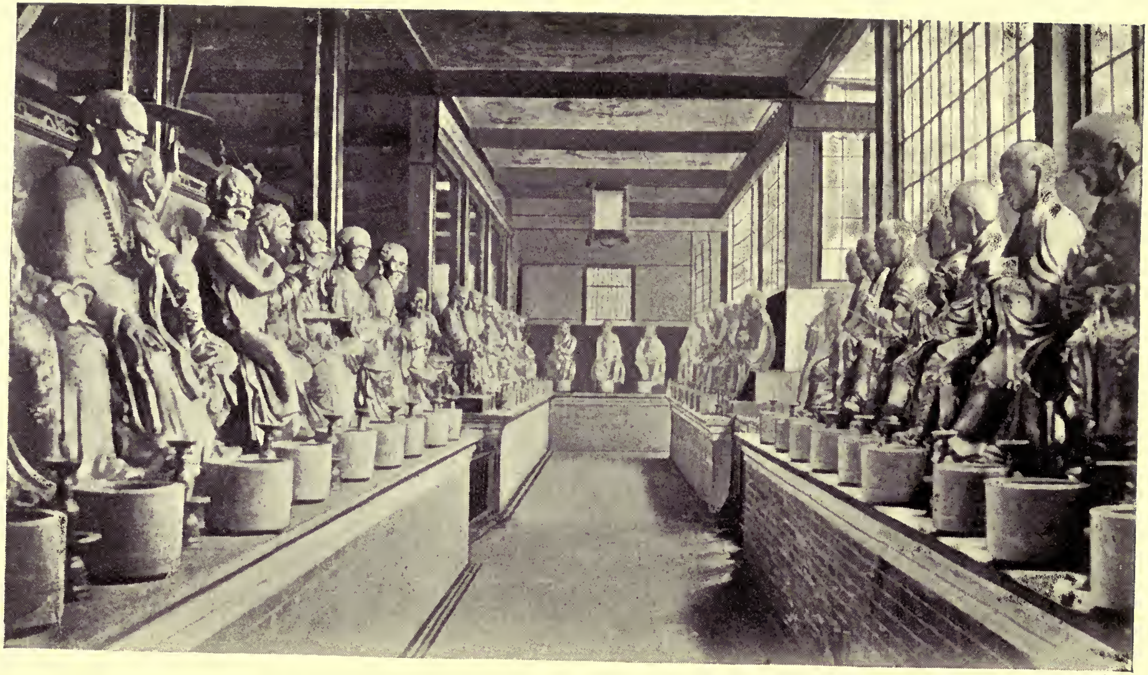
Brother John is a conundrum that no one has ever yet been able to solve. Foreigners of all nationalities who have come to live in China leave the country with the vague feeling that the native is a quantity impossible to analyse. It is a fact that a foreigner may spend his days among this people, enter into their social life, speak their language almost as well as themselves, and yet at the end of forty years will honestly declare that there are a great many things about them that he does not pretend to understand. It will be obvious from this that the Chinese is no shallow or superficial character. It is the very complexity of his make-up that renders him such a mystery. The elements that are found in him and the oblique methods by which the yellow brain works are the things that puzzle the Occidental who has been accustomed to the more direct methods of the men of the West.

At first sight the Chinese is very unattractive. His skin is of yellow hue and his voice is harsh and unmusical. Judged by a Western standard, there is not a feature in his face that could ever by the widest charity be called beautiful. His cheekbones stand out staring and protuberant. His nose is as flat as though his far-off progenitor had had it bruised in some pugilistic encounter, and had transmitted it maimed and battered to his posterity. His lips are thick and his mouth wide and open, a veritable sepulchre for the huge mouthfuls of rice that he daily shovels into it with his chopsticks. His eyes, too, which are always black, are narrow and almond-shaped, and the eyeballs, instead of being large and full-orbed, dance and twinkle inside the narrow slits, as though they were playing hide-and-seek with the world. In addition to all this there is often a dull and soulless look about the great mass of the people that gives one the impression of an utter lack of fancy or imagination. In spite of all these disadvantages, there is a nameless something about the Chinese that makes the Englishman like him better than any of the other peoples of the Orient.

One of the principal reasons for this, no doubt, is his keen sense of humour. This is not of the dry, musty kind that lies so deeply ingrained that it requires a surgical operation to extract it. It pervades the man, and is of that broad and jolly kind that is close to the surface and bubbles over at the least provocation. Anything ludicrous or grotesque makes him break out into laughter, or causes smiles, like sunshine on a rugged hillside, to light up his features. A funny story or a humorous remark transforms the solid, sphinx-like face, so that you feel drawn to the man who a moment before seemed separated from you by an impassable gulf.

No Chinese, no matter what mood he may be in, can ever withstand the power of a joke. It seems to be a solvent that disperses the ugliest of tempers. I have seen a man surly and ill-disposed turned into a friend by some witty remark. I have also known of a crowd that was decidedly hostile and prepared for some ugly horseplay completely captured by some humorous expression that sent smiles flashing across their rugged features, and converted them into the friends of the man who a few minutes before they were ready to stone.

In any estimate that we may make of the Chinese we must never forget that his mind runs in grooves that



TEMPLE WITH THREE CHIEF GODS IN THE DISTANCE, AND ATTENDANT GODS ON EACH SIDE.

are essentially different from those of the Anglo-Saxon. The latter prefers to go directly to the heart of any subject with which he is dealing. When he makes a statement, we at once accept it as the thing he wishes us to believe. The Chinese mind is the very reverse of this. It abhors the idea of directness, and prefers to tell its story in a roundabout way.

The foreigner does not require to be many years in China before he discovers that it is impossible to be sure of what a Chinese means by what he says. You listen to him with great attention. His face is as calm and as guileless as that of an infant and the words glide from his lips in an easy and natural way ; and yet experience teaches you that the thing he is saying and the thing he means have only a very remote connection with each other.

It is this habit that renders it extremely difficult to get a Chinese to give you a direct answer to any question that you may put to him. You have asked a mason to give you an estimate for some work that you wished him to do for you. You have allowed him a week to work out the details. At the time appointed he appears with all the items marked out on a sheet of paper, and in true Anglo-Saxon style you say, " Well, how much can you do the work for? " He looks aghast at you. This kind of question and answer is opposed to the very genius of the nation and must be sternly met. He ignores the question so brutally put to him, and he goes on to say that the job you have asked him to do is a very difficult one because of the many intricate details connected with it. You get impatient, and you say, " I don't want to hear any of your details. I simply want to know how much you are going to charge." He goes on unmoved and proceeds to tick off on his fingers the various kinds of materials that will be required. You become indignant and insist upon his telling you at once and without any delay what he intends to charge. He is still as unmoved as though he were the Great Wall of China against which you had been knocking your head. You find it useless to contend against a force that does not seem to recognise any will but his own. You simply collapse and listen in a kind of exasperated way till he has gone through all the explanation that he deems necessary, and finally he blurts out the sum you wish to know.

A Chinese never seems to understand that language is intended to express thought in as direct a way as possible. It is more often than not simply used as a vehicle to suggest ideas that remain in the background and have to be learned by inference. A man, for example, will come to you with the face of a saint, and he will give you nine good reasons for a certain course of action he has taken. You find by and by that not one of them is true, and that the real one that would have explained the whole matter was kept back. You ask him why he did this, and with a face that really beams with candour he will give you nine more why he did not, not one of which, however, will be any more reliable than those he previously gave you.

The Chinese, in one respect at least, are a very exasperating people, because of the dogged and determined manner in which they insist upon having their own way. You wish something done and you present your plans and you show how you wish them carried out. The listener objects and suggests modifications. You are firm and declare that you want none of his advice. He appears to come round to your view. His face assumes a childlike, satisfied expression and he says that really after all your plans are the best. When the work is finished you find to your dismay that he has carried out, not your ideas but his own. You ask him why he has dared to do this. "Oh! " he says simply, " I thought that my way was the best."

A lady calls in a tailor to make a dress. She gives him precise instructions as to pattern, trimming, &c., and he departs with a yellow smile lighting up the hills and caverns of his childlike face. He perfectly understands what she wants, he says, and with a business-like air he gathers up the materials and vanishes, saying, " I come day after to-morrow morning." A few days after he appears again with the dress finished. The same jaundiced smile that he had when he last left flickers over his face, and he hastens to open up the parcel and display the glories of silk and lace that have been combined by his deft and cunning hand into an enchanting dress. No sooner is it spread out than a shadow passes over the lady's face, "Why, tailor," she exclaims, "you have changed the pattern. What is the meaning of this?" "Oh! " exclaims the Celestial in pidgin English, "I makee changee more better. I number one piecee good tailor; my too muchee savey (know), you no savey, dress more pletty, can do so fashion." The supreme cheek of this tailor in setting up his opinion as superior to the lady's is but in keeping with the general attitude of his countrymen throughout the empire.

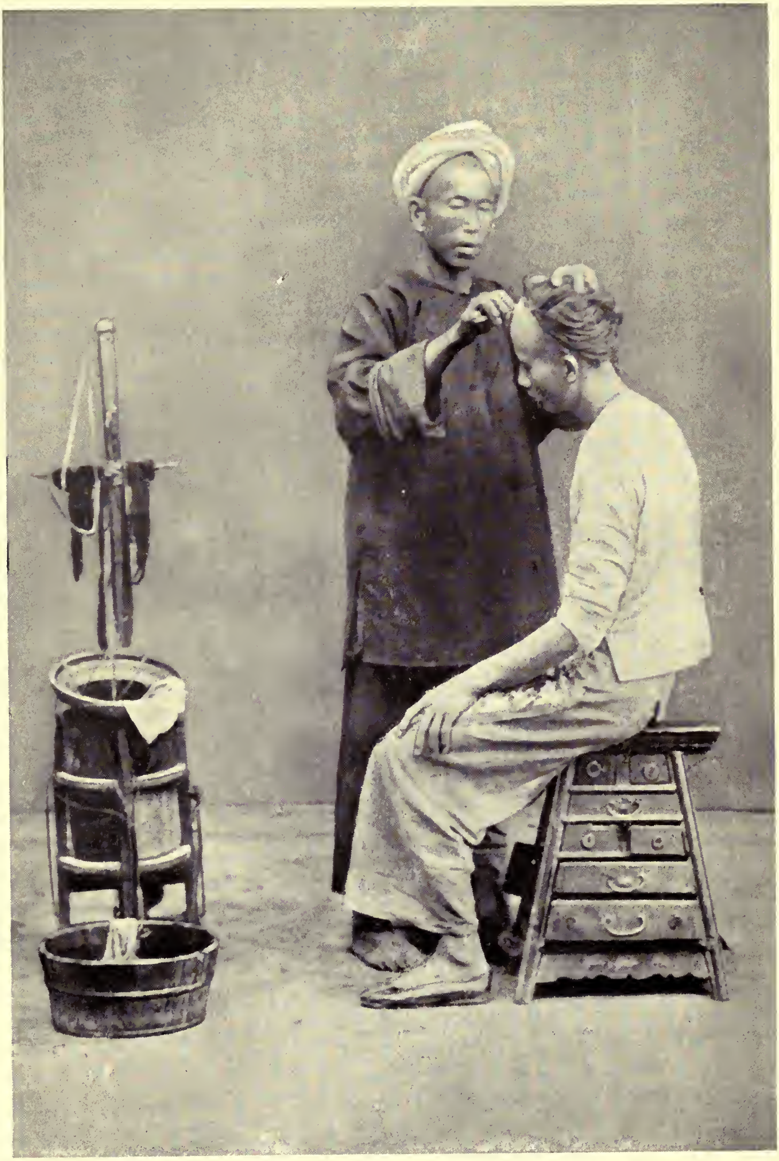
Now all this, whilst very annoying at the time, never causes one to indulge in vindictive feelings. Even when a Chinese is most exasperating, the humorous element is so powerful that more often than not the indignant feelings find relief in a fit of laughter. The cool way in which he will romance and build up a story in which there is not a single atom of truth excites one's sense of the ridiculous to such an extent that it is impossible to sustain one's anger. The feeling of a man mentioned in Smith's "Chinese Characteristics," who was in a chronic state of indecision whether he should murder one of his mulish servants or raise his wages, well expresses the varying emotions that the foreigner has in dealing with that strange but unique character the Chinese.

There is one feature in the Chinese that is most distressing, and that is his untruthfulness. From our point of view he seems to possess no sense of truth. If you think you will shame him by telling him that he is lying you will receive a decided shock. He will simply smile, assume a benevolent air, and assure you that he never told a lie in his life. A very common expression and one in constant use is, "There is not a shadow" (meaning of truth) "in what you say." Two men are in conversation and you are startled at the blunt, brutal way in which this statement is used, and you expect to see the man who has uttered it felled to the ground, but nothing of the kind happens. The word seems to convey no more offensive meaning than our own phrase, "Oh! you are surely joking."

A rough, coarse coolie once, in answer to some statement that I had made, replied to me in the common phrase above referred to. I said to him: "You will have to be careful how you talk that way to Englishmen. Some of these days you will get your face damaged so that your own mother will not recognise you." He looked at me in astonishment. He could not grasp my meaning. A lie was of so little consequence to him that to be told that he was telling one would no more move him than if you were to inform him that he was a poet or an historian.

This universal untruthfulness meets you at every turn. One day I went to call upon a Chinese merchant to get a subscription for a hospital. I did not know him by sight, and as I entered his door I asked a sober, quiet-looking man if the master was in. " He has just gone out," he promptly replied, and he pointed down the street in the direction in which he was supposed to have gone. Something very slight occurred to make it flash upon me that this was the very man I was seeking. Smiling, I said to him, " You are the gentleman I want to see, and now you will have to give me a double subscription for trying to deceive me." A broad grin overspread his features, and the people standing by seemed highly amused, but they never attempted to apologise for the lie and no shade of uneasiness crossed the face of this rich man, who had endeavoured to get rid of an unwelcome visitor by a device that every Chinese would adopt in similar circumstances.

Another day I went on a similar errand to the house of a wealthy banker. I had scarcely entered before a servant informed me that the gentleman I wished to see was so ill that he could see no one but the members of his own family. I doubted this, so I quietly took a seat, and said I would wait till his master got well. I told him I was in no hurry whatever, and that the sick man could take his time about getting well for I was quite willing to remain until he was convalescent. The man's eyes opened in amazement. He was evidently tickled with the idea and if he had dared he would have laughed, but he kept his face as solemn as a sepulchre and went off to report what I had said to his master. In a few minutes he returned with the latter's apologies and with the request to call another day as he was really too ill to see me. I replied that



A STREET SHAVE.

To face p. 319.

I was very sorry to hear that he was so unwell, but as I had leisure just now at my disposal, I would prefer to remain until he was well enough to see me. After several attempts to get rid of me I was finally admitted to his private sitting-room. I found there was really nothing the matter with him, and when I entered his face was suffused with a broad grin at the exquisite joke of a man waiting for another who was supposed to be very ill until he had recovered.

One's mental faculties are always on the stretch in China, weighing and balancing evidence like a judge or jury to find out the exact truth of statements that are made to you. A man, for example, comes into your room with a mysterious air. He glances round about to see if there is any one else. He goes to the windows and furtively looks through the cracks. He steps on tiptoe to the door and peers down both ways to discover if any one is lurking about. He then returns in a silent, cat-like way, gives a rapid glance at the chimney and then points to the ceiling, then to the ground, next to you, and finally to himself, as much as to say, "There are four witnesses to what I am going to say, Heaven, Earth, you and I, so truth is to be spoken now." He then leans forward with another covert glance at the door and pours into your ear a story about another person in whom you have considerable faith that gives you a shock as though you had been in contact with a powerful galvanic battery. After a time you recover yourself, and then the judicial process of weighing evidence begins. How much of this is true, how much exaggerated, and what important facts have been left untold, are questions that travel through your brain, as the large-mouthed, high-cheekboned Celestial pours out his insinuations into your ear. You discover by and by that one essential fact that would have cleared the reputation of your friend has been withheld. You feel relieved, you breathe once more as you get rid of the grave suspicion that had rankled in your mind, and you can now meet the man that you doubted with an open countenance and a trusting heart.

It must not be inferred from the description given above of Brother John that he is an indefinite, weakkneed character. He is anything but that. If ever a race had a stiff backbone, it is the Chinese. One sign of strength is the power he undoubtedly possesses of adapting himself to any circumstances in which he may be situated. Place him in a northern climate, where the sun's rays have lost their fire, and where the snow falls and the frost lays its icy hands upon the forces of Nature, and he will thrive as though he had come from an ancestry that had always lived in a frozen region. Transport him to the torrid zone, where the sun is a great ball of molten flame, where the air is as hot as though it had come from a volcano, and he will move about with an ease and comfort as though a sultry climate was the very thing that his system demanded.

He is so cosmopolitan in his nature that it seems to be a matter of indifference what may happen to him. He will travel along lofty peaks where the snows of successive winters lie unmelted, or he will sleep in a grass hut at the edge of a swamp, where the *Anopheles* mosquitoes will sing their songs and feast upon him. He will be carried sumptuously in a luxurious sedan-chair, as though he were the most delicate of mortals, or he will descend into the sultry tinmines of Siam as though they were the home in which he was born, and at night he will stretch himself on the hard, uneven ground, with a brick for his pillow, and will rise next morning as refreshed as though he had slept on a bed of down.

You meet the Chinese everywhere under the most varied conditions, but he seems natural under every one of them. He walks about in an easy, unsurprised way a first-class passenger in a crack mail steamer, or he curls himself up in a native river boat like a snail, in a space where no human being could live an hour but himself, and he sleeps a dreamless sleep the livelong night in a fetid atmosphere that would give an Occidental disorders from which he might never recover.

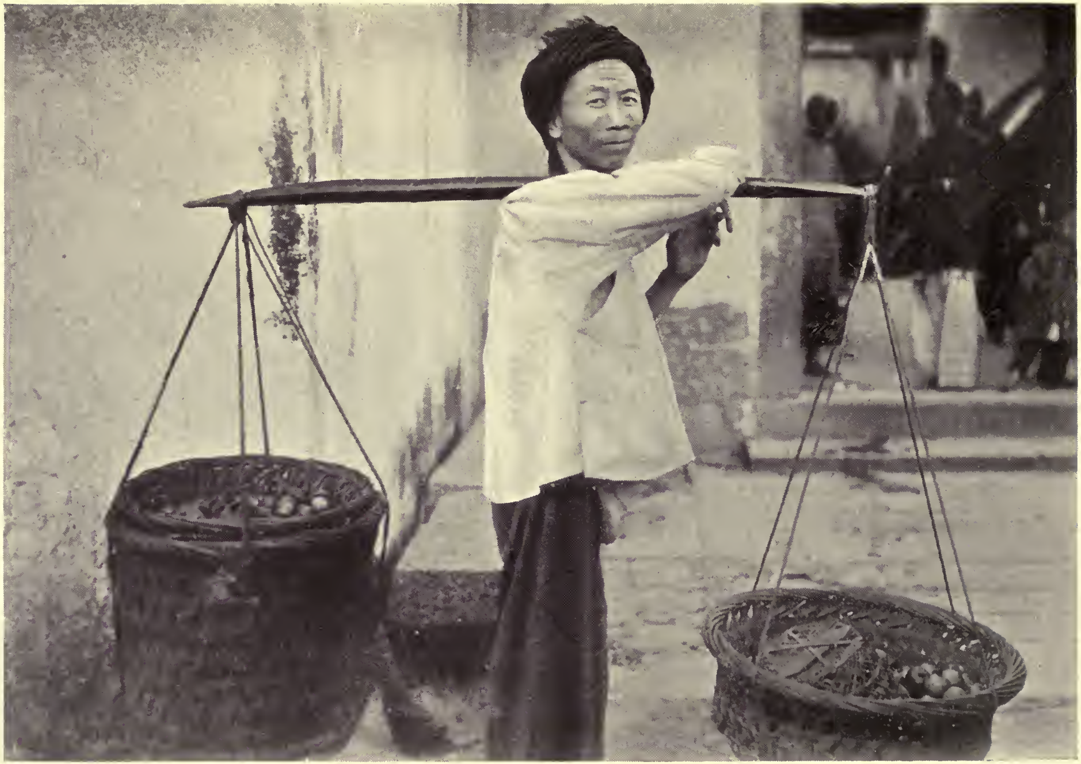
Whatever the social condition of the Chinese may be, whether merchant or coolie, artisan or day labourer, one becomes impressed with the idea that behind those harsh and inartistic features there is a strength of physique and a latent power of endurance that seem to make him independent of climate and impervious to microbes, germs, bacteria, and all the other scourges that seem to exist for the destruction of human life excepting the Chinese.

One advantage the Celestial has over the Occidental is what may be called his absence of nerves. The rush and race and competition of the West have never yet touched the East. The Orient is sober and measured and never in a hurry. An Englishman, were all other signs wanting, can easily be distinguished as he walks along the road by his rapid stride, the jerky movements of his arms, and the nervous poise of his head, all so different from the unemotional crowd around him, who seem to consider that they have an eternity before them in which to finish their walk, and so there is no need for hurry. There is no doubt but that this absence of nerves is a very important factor in enabling the Chinese to adapt himself so readily to any circumstances in which he may be placed. Take the matter of pain. He bears it with the composure of a saint. The heroic never seems to come out so grandly as when he is enduring some awful suffering that only a martyr would be willing to bear. I have seen a man come into a hospital with a hand one mass of inflammation, swollen and angry-looking, that must have been giving him torture. His face was drawn and its yellow hue had turned to a slightly livid colour, but there were no other signs that he was in agony. The surgeon drove his knife deep into the angry, inflamed mass, but only the sounds "ai-ya," uttered with a prolonged emphasis, and the twisting up of the muscles of one side of the face showed that he was conscious of any pain. An Occidental of the same class would most probably have howled and perhaps a couple of assistants would have had to hold him whilst the doctor was operating.

It is this same spirit that enables the Chinese to bear suffering of any kind with a patience and a fortitude that is perfectly Spartan. He will live from one year's end to another on food that seems utterly inadequate for human use. He will slave at the severest toil, with no Sunday to break its monotony and no change to give the mind rest. He will see sorrow, inevitable, unappeasable, resting over his home, and yet he will go on with the duties of life with a sturdy tread and a meditative, mystic look upon his face that reminds one of those statues of Buddha that one sees in the great temples and monasteries. It is but fair to state here that the women show no less strength of character than the men. They endure pain and sorrow with as uncomplaining a spirit as they do the toils and duties of life, and the hardships brought upon them by the misconduct of their husbands when they become gamblers or opium-smokers are borne with a spirit of heroism that gives us a high idea of their fortitude and bravery.

Another evidence of the strength of the Chinese is the calm and unruffled way in which he will submit to delay and wait the time of others, a thing that so ruffles the temper of the Occidental.

A man, for example, calls upon you for some special purpose. He has something to ask you that is of the utmost importance to him. When he first addresses you, he does not show this either in his face or his manner. You happen to be occupied at the time and you request him to be seated. He does so with the appearance that he has infinite leisure at his command and that he has just dropped in without having any special reason for doing so. You suddenly leave the room for a moment, and something engages your attention, so that you forget all about the man. An hour may elapse and when you return he rises from his seat with a smile upon his face, and with a courteous bow, in either of which there is not the slightest sign of temper. An Occidental would have fretted and fumed, and received you with flaming eyes and a face clouded with indignation, and very likely you would have parted from each other in mutual disgust and displeasure. The absence of nerves and the staying power that had kept him glued to his chair whilst you had forgotten his very existence are the forces that enable him to gain his purpose in the end. The Englishman would go off in a towering rage. He has been insulted and he eases his mind by a forcible expression of opinion about yourself that will render any further communication with you extremely improbable.



A FRUIT-SELLER.

The Celestial would think that an absolute waste of power. He has a certain object to obtain, which he can get in no way so easily or effectually as through you. Why should he allow passion or temper to prevent this? He will sit two hours, or four if necessary, with a face as serene and unclouded as though he had already attained the passionless state of Nirvana. Indeed, if you were to ask him to call again to-morrow morning, as your time was just now limited, he would put on a childlike smile, and declare that it was perfectly convenient for him, and he would leave you with a profusion of stately bows to show how completely satisfied he was with the arrangement.

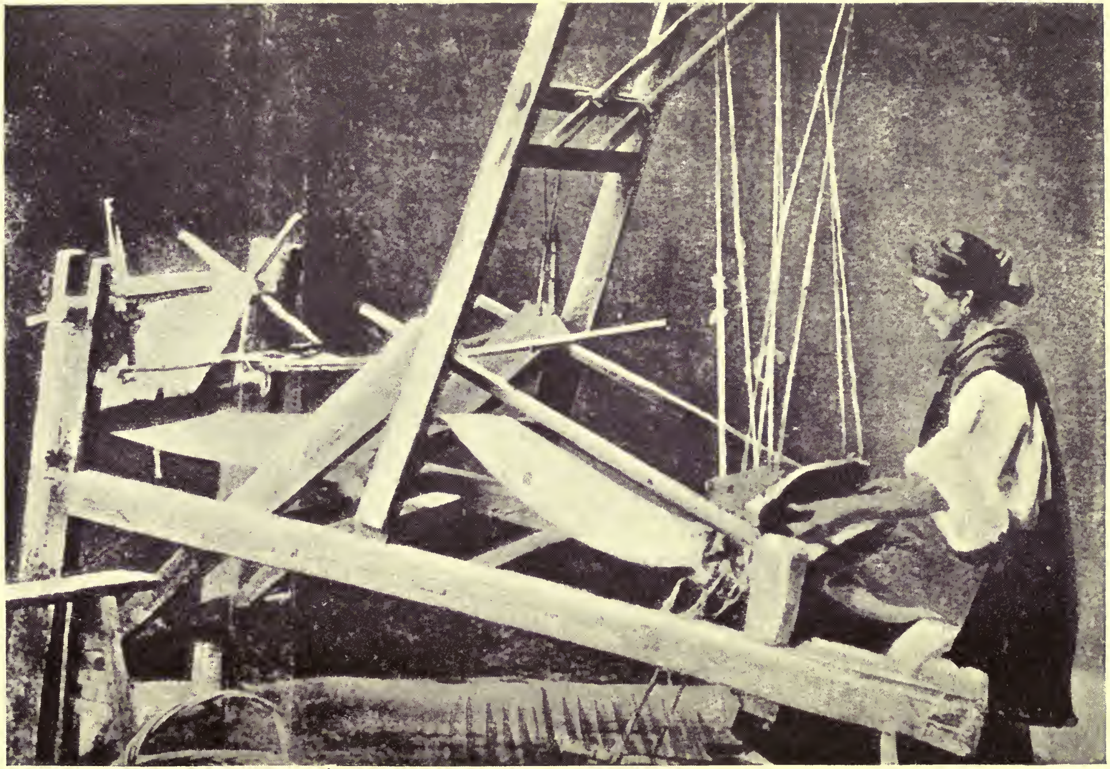
To-morrow at the appointed hour, just as he is entering, you suddenly recollect that you have an important engagement. You sigh and wonder what you are going to do. You state your difficulty to him and he at once relieves your anxiety by assuring you that the delay of another day will not make the least difference to him, and that he will be happy to come again at any hour the next day that may be perfectly suitable for you. Such untiring patience and good-humour irresistibly appeal to you, and if it is possible you will put yourself out to grant the request of the man who has shown such tact in bringing it before you.

The sleuthhound instinct that is strong in the Chinese is being constantly illustrated in everyday life. There is one instance in the life of the famous general Tso Chung-tang that will explain exactly what I mean. In A.D. 1873 the great Mohammedan rebellion had swept with desolating force over Eastern Turkestan and the western boundaries of China. It was deemed essential for the very safety of the empire that this should be put down, and that the countries that had revolted should be brought to submission. General Tso was appointed to the command of the army that was to engage in this most difficult undertaking. No ordinary man would have been competent to carry on a campaign that tested the ability of the ablest of commanders. The rebels were not only in some of the extreme provinces of the empire, but they were also in a wide extent of territory that stretched hundreds of miles beyond. The country was mountainous or hilly and only partially cultivated. There were no regular roads by which to travel. The people were fierce and warlike and the difficulty of getting regular supplies for an invading army seemed absolutely insurmountable.

As long as Tso was in touch with his own country he managed, after superhuman efforts, to feed his soldiers with the provisions forwarded him by the Government. When, however, he launched into the regions held by the enemy, he found that the feeding of his large army was a problem that was likely to test his resources to the very utmost. He saw plainly that he could not have provisions brought to him. Long strings of camels and horses would come into his camp, but when the bags that ought to have contained the corn and rice for his soldiers were opened, they were found to be nearly empty, for the animals and the men that had brought them had nearly consumed them for their own support on the long journey they had travelled.

Any ordinary commander would have retired to his base to save his army from destruction, but Tso determined that no disgrace of this kind should ever tarnish the splendid record that had made his name famous. He has made up his mind to carry out to a successful issue the mandate he had received from the Emperor. He accordingly devised a plan that would perhaps never have occurred to any but a Chinese brain, and he at once proceeded to put it into execution. Having secured a district suitable for his purpose, he made an entrenched camp and turned the whole of his soldiers into farmers. The vast majority of them had been such before they joined the ranks, so they had not to learn the business of farming. Fields were measured out and garden plots where all kinds of cereals and vegetables could be grown, and the astonishing sight was seen of a large military force being converted into peaceful husbandmen, whose one aim seemed not to be fighting but enticing from Nature the rich crops that were to cover the fields and meadows with luxuriant harvests.

A year went by and the commissariat was plentifully supplied with the requisites for the need of the army.



A WOMAN WEAVING.

Never was the staying power of the Chinese more signally illustrated or more severely tested than during this year of enforced military inaction. Tso was eating out his heart to be at his enemies and crush out the rebellion, but he doggedly held on to his purpose, knowing that in the end he must conquer.

One morning the trumpet sounded and, in an instant, the farmers were once more transformed into soldiers. Regiments were re-formed, and men hastened to rejoin their colours, and ere long the tramp of the soldiers was heard as they advanced against the strongholds of the enemy. Again and again the farmer experiment had to be resorted to, but in the end, after years of patient, bulldog perseverance, the rebellion was crushed and Tso with his farmer-soldier veterans had the honour of restoring the revolted provinces to the allegiance of the empire.

The staying power of the Chinese is exhibited in every phase of life in which you meet him. In one of the western provinces there are saltmines that it takes forty years to bore. A man begins work with the consciousness that he will never see the end of it. Never mind, his son may, and so he begins to drill. The seasons come and go and he still continues to drill. The winter comes with its frost and the summer with its sultry heat, but there is no stay. The years roll by and old age creeps over him, and still he is drilling, and the last sounds that he may hear in life are the voices of men that are still boring for the brine that lies hidden deep in the bowels of the earth.

In the character of the Chinese there are many conflicting elements, some of them undoubtedly a source of weakness. The chief one, apart from those that involve any moral question, is his tendency to be content with a slipshod way of executing any duty that it comes to him to perform. He seems to have no great ideal by which he fashions his life. Just as the word "efficiency" represents in the West the keynote, as it were, of the motive power that dominates men's thoughts there, so it would be no injustice to the Chinese to declare that the word that describes their mental attitude is the one in constant use among them, viz., "anyhow."

The servants in the house, the employees in a firm, the mechanic in his trade, the official in his office, never seem to be impressed with the thought that they must do everything in the very best style because they should take a pride in doing the most perfect work they are capable of. No, " anyhow " exactly paints the attitude of mind into which the nation has fallen. It meets one everywhere. A thing comes home badly finished, days after it has been promised ; a servant neglects to do a certain appointed work ; the chair-bearers, instead of being ready at daylight as arranged, will saunter in two hours late ; a certain payment is promised on a specified date, but no money is forthcoming ; an order is given to a tailor for a dress that must be ready for a certain occasion, and he walks in with it next morning. No one seems troubled about any failure such as the above. The ready phrase which, though it means "anyhow," is a very complicated one and carries with it " don't be particular," " let it pass this time," " never mind," seems to satisfy the Chinese mind and to be a ready excuse for every neglect. That the Chinese character has many elements of strength is undoubted, but there will have to be a serious revolution in it before it will be able to compete with the other nations of the world, and the easy-going way in which the life of most of the people is taken will have to be exchanged for a more strenuous one in the years that are before the republic.

CHAPTER XXV

THE NEW EMPIRE OF CHINA

WITHIN the last twenty years there has been a remarkable development of thought that has permeated every section of the national life. This has not been the result of accident, but is the fruit of strenuous and sustained effort that has been carried on for a long series of years.

When the missionary first began to endeavour to influence the Chinese crowds that flocked around him as he travelled into districts where the foreigner had never been seen before, he soon discovered that one of the greatest forces to make an impression upon them was the printed page. The scholar in China stands in the front rank of society, and books are looked upon with the most profound veneration and respect. Even the printed character, with its old-world mysterious look, holds a high position in the estimation of every one, learned and unlearned alike.

In every large city one can see men with baskets slung over their shoulders, on which are written largely and so distinctly that every one can read them at a glance the words, " Pity the characters." These men are paid to go round the streets and pick up bits of paper and broken pieces of crockery with writing on them. People think it an indignity that these characters that have been the source of the empire's greatness should be trodden under the feet of the passers-by, and so they are rescued from the streets and with due ceremony and honour burned in stoves that have been specially erected in some public place for the purpose.

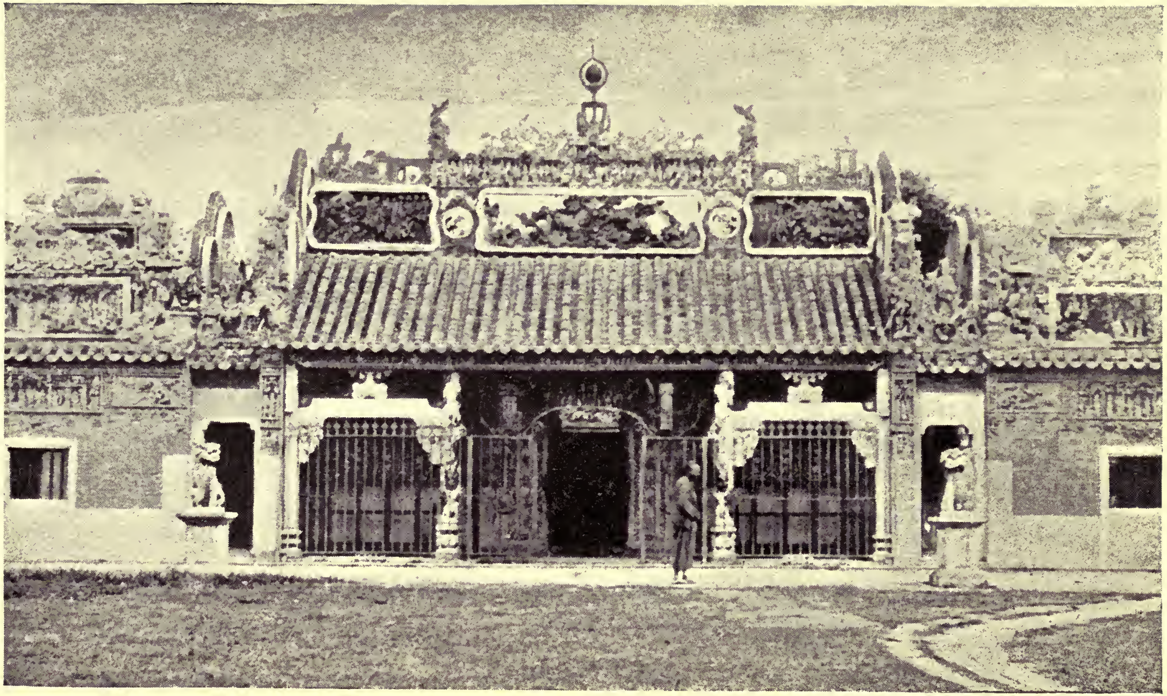
It soon became evident that the great auxiliary of the preacher in his itinerations through the country was the books that he carried with him and that he sold to his audiences. These remained with his hearers after he had proceeded on his journey. In early years these were entirely of a religious character, and consisted of Gospels and tracts dealing with popular customs and superstitions which he knew would be read and studied by many who had never listened to his preaching.

Books were the only medium by which the scholars of any particular district could be reached, for one very rarely met with any of these gentry in the popular gatherings that flocked round the missionary in these tours. They had too much contempt for him to come near him, and besides, they were most indignant that a barbarian should dare to assume the rôle of teacher and profess to be able to enlighten a land that was fully competent to teach the whole world.

Still, it was of prime importance that these men should be influenced. They were the only aristocracy of China, as well as its thinkers. They were, moreover, the teachers in the schools throughout the empire, and consequently held a unique place of power and influence over the masses of the people.

Books accordingly were prepared that would specially appeal to them. Some of these dealt with religious phases of thought that would prove attractive to them, and which brought up great questions that had never been discussed in their own classical writings. In the course of time some of the best works of the West on a great variety of subjects, such as history, science, international law, &c., were translated by the missionaries and brought within the reach of the reading men of China.

One very favourite and effective way of doing this was by meeting the men at their triennial examinations for their degrees. These occurred at every prefectural city throughout the empire, and as many as ten thousand would attend these to compete for their B.A. It was a magnificent opportunity for getting the élite of a prefecture, gathered from five or six counties, within the narrow compass of a city and of distributing books that were full of thoughts for a new life, amongst a body of men that were so conservative and so anti-foreign as these gentry always were.



A TEMPLE IN CANTON.

Many a rare scene of adventure took place when the missionary appeared amongst them with his books. The favourite place where he took his stand was at the main entrance to the great Examination Hall, where they had been closely confined whilst they were being examined. As they trooped out a look of contempt seemed to sweep across their faces as they caught sight of the barbarian, and to cast a dark shadow over them.

They were too polite and refined to adopt the violent methods of the mob, but they had a more insulting way of showing their feelings. Some of them stood and stared in his face as though he were a wild animal that had only recently been caught, and which they examined with looks of wonder and amazement. Others, proud and defiant, marched by him with their heads high in the air as though he were utterly beneath their notice. A moment after there would be a rush of the more hot-blooded, and he would be hustled up against the side of a wall, whilst his books lay scattered on the ground.

Then others would come along who resented such coarse treatment of the stranger, and with smiles and bows would receive his books with promises to read them when they reached their homes, whilst others, again, of a more original and independent turn of mind, would eagerly scan the titles of his books, and with many profuse thanks accept them from him.

At least a thousand copies would thus be distributed amongst the ten thousand, and these would be carried off into towns and villages and market-places in the prefecture, and during the long evenings, when the home was buried in sleep, the men would ponder over them, and new pictures would be formed in their minds such as the writings of the sages had never been able to conjure up. In these thousand studies a new empire began to dawn in the thoughts of these students, and a new vision of the unseen world that no writer of romance had ever been able to picture before their imaginations.

In the course of years, the Christian and secular literature that the missionary provided for the readers in the nation slowly but surely began to affect the thinking even of those who at first were most hostile to the foreigner. Truth is imperious and brooks no defiance of its mysterious sway, and men unconsciously found themselves controlled by thoughts that upset all their ideals of life. In time the bookshops that were set up by the missionaries in great centres in the country where the new books could be obtained, found their best customers amongst these very literati who had been most violent in their opposition to reform.

One of the most striking evidences of the success with which the missionaries had been able to influence the thoughts and convictions of what might be termed the ruling class in China, namely, the scholars, was the calm and placid way in which they consented to the new system by which degrees were to be obtained in the future.

In the past for countless centuries these had been obtained after profound study of the classics. These were practically the only textbooks that were allowed by the Imperial Examiner when once in three years he came round in almost royal state to examine men for their degrees.

All at once like a thunderbolt from the blue an edict was issued by the late Emperor Kuang-Su abolishing this system and establishing Government schools with a new curriculum, which besides the classics contained other subjects imported from the West that the scholar of the past would have looked upon with perfect horror. One of these was a knowledge of English. The men that passed through this course successfully and succeeded in satisfying the Examiners got their degrees, whilst the old-world method was abolished.

In any other country but China there would have been the wildest excitement, and, perhaps, widespread revolution. At one stroke of the vermilion pencil vast numbers of the scholars of the land were disenfranchised. Those who had already obtained their degrees were safe, but there were millions of others in whose hearts the very dream of their lives would die out and never again flash its mystery upon their hearts.

The years of toil that these men had spent in learning the classics had all been wasted. The subjects in which they were masters, and through which honour and wealth were to come to them, were no longer of any use to them. To the middle-aged and older men the future was entirely closed, for they could never enter the new schools and compete with the younger blood that would flock into them. What a crushing blow to the men who constituted the intellect and brains of the empire! And yet the edict was received without any protest. No local riots took place, and no gatherings of the literati in the Confucian guilds throughout the provinces were convened to denounce the action of the Emperor in thus destroying by an arbitrary edict the privileges of their Order.

The Chinese is a thoughtful man and a loyal one. For years the work of the missionary in moulding the minds of the literati by giving them the best and most advanced thoughts of Western nations had given them a new inspiration. They had discovered that if China was ever to come to the front as a great imperial force in the East their system of education must be radically reformed, and so with a rare patriotism which shows the finer metal of which these men were composed they consented to efface themselves that their country might be exalted. Japan, they saw, had risen to be a great power through the willingness of its people to be inspired with the genius of the West. China must never be allowed to take a second place to a land that for many centuries had been her vassal. She could never hope by force of arms and by bloody campaigns to rise to the height that Japan had done, but she saw in the new learning the potency of a higher life that would exalt the nation to a supreme place in the councils of the world.

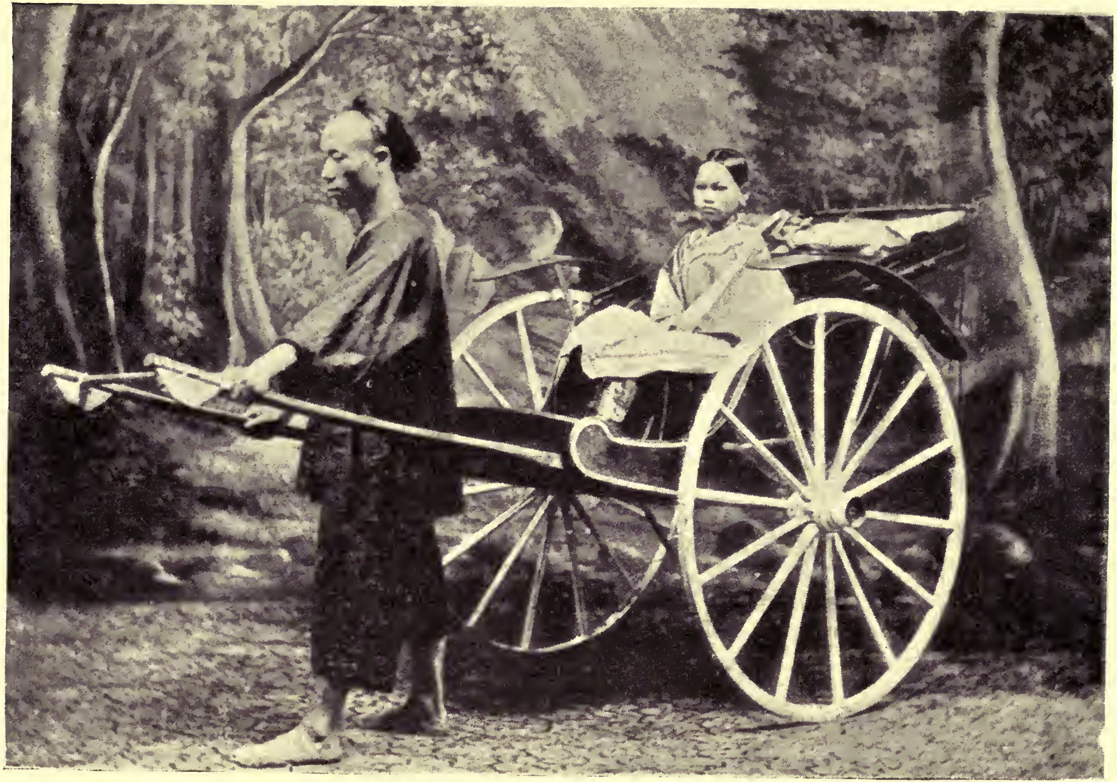
The Government schools are now in full work with the new system of studies, and young China is full of the highest hopes. The awful drudgery of the past was being compelled to commit to memory endless pages of hieroglyphs, from which there peer out only the visages of ancient worthies, and where no child's voice is ever heard and no woman's face is ever seen. The romance of thought is now filling their imaginations, and the history and brave deeds of other lands and the marvellous discoveries of science are now flashing through their brains, and, best of all, the honours that could never have come to so many now lie within the grasp of every ambitious lad.

In one of these a young Christian man of eighteen or nineteen years of age was studying. Under the old régime many a long year of painful drudgery would have had to elapse before he could have gained his coveted degree. When the examinations took place and the lists were put out his was amongst the first of the names that had gained their degree. I was astounded, for I knew that his scholarship was not of such a profound character as would entitle him to this high honour. On inquiry I found that it was his knowledge of English that had led the Examiner to pass him. How far China has already travelled from the ideals of the past and how new a vision has come into the eyes of its people may be gathered from this one fact.

Another sign of the awakening of China is the great national revolution that is now convulsing the empire. Although the new learning is in a certain sense largely responsible for this, the chief causes that have led to this date farther back in the life of the nation.

In the year A.D. 1644 the Manchus became the rulers of China. They had been invited by one of the last emperors of the Ming dynasty to hasten to his assistance with all their forces to aid in building up the fortunes of his falling House. They were fascinated with the empire they had come to help, and they were determined to hold it for themselves. Never had such a prize been placed within their grasp. They had often made wild forays along the borders of this delectable land and their eyes had glistened with delight as they gazed upon the scene before them. The smiling country, with its fertile pastures and mountain streams and homes that seemed so full of plenty, looked beautiful to these wild raiders, and now the whole empire, with its broad plains and lofty mountains and magnificent rivers, stretched out before their excited imaginations and was theirs if only they had the courage to seize upon it.

There was no room for hesitation here. The prize must not be allowed to slip from their grasp. The country was in disorder and the forces that might have



A JINRICKSHAW.

opposed them were scattered and disorganised, and so the order was given and the throne was seized and the capital occupied, whilst garrisons were thrown into the provincial capitals and the domination of the Manchus was complete.

A more unsuitable race of people could never have come into so splendid an inheritance. The conquerors belonged to a wild, barbaric race, full of the fighting spirit that they had inherited from a long line of ancestors. Their civilisation was of the very lowest order and had never been elevated by the refinements that learning ever brings in its train.

If any of the great men in their tribe had ever been conspicuous for anything in the past, it was because they were more daring and more mad and ferocious in their adventures of pillage and slaughter in their savage incursions into the Flowery Kingdom. It was against such tribes as theirs that Shih Hwang Ti, the first Emperor of China (B.C. 221), had built the Great Wall to stay the inroads of the uncivilised, murderous hordes that lay beyond.

The Chinese, on the other hand, were in many respects a highly civilised race. They were settled in a country that was rich in natural products of every kind. Great cities with enormous populations were to be found throughout the length and breadth of it. Splendid edifices and porcelain towers and tall pagodas and palatial buildings for the rich bore evidence to the refinement and luxuriance of its people.

It was a land, too, of learning, and men of the highest culture abounded in it. It had a history that could be traced back to the days when the great sages lived and when they taught and wrote those wonderful treatises that have been so potent in moulding the character of the generations that have slowly built up the empire.

That its people should submit to the Manchus was utterly repugnant to every Chinese within the broad area of the empire. They never could endure the thought that a great nation like theirs, with its countless millions of inhabitants, should have been subdued by a few hundred thousand savage horsemen, who, taking advantage of the distracted state of the country, had taken possession of an empire that they were totally unfit to govern. They were barbarians, and for such every Chinese had an undying hatred and contempt.

During the long years of the past the nation has never submitted to the domination of the Manchus. They have always been looked upon as an alien race and as members of a barbarian tribe that ought to be driven back again across the Great Wall into the wilds of a country that suited their habits and character.

In consequence of this deep-seated antipathy secret societies have always been in existence in every province, whose distinguishing watchword has been "The destruction of the Ching and the restoration of the Ming." The present Manchu dynasty is called the Ching or the Pure, whilst the one that they overthrew is known by its appellation of Ming or the Intelligent.

Many efforts have at various times been made to raise insurrections to overthrow the Manchus. The most successful of these was the one called the Taiping or Long-haired rebellion. Starting in the extreme south, the revolutionary wave swept over the country till the most of the southern provinces were in the hands of the patriots. Many of the great cities on the Yang-tze, including even Nanking, the ancient capital of China, were in their hands, and the Manchu forces had been routed and scattered by the soldiers of the revolution.

There is no doubt whatever but that they would have been successful in the end and that before long a native dynasty would have been sitting on the Dragon throne if the revolution had been allowed to take its own course, but, unfortunately, it was not.

The Taiping soldiers had reached Shanghai, which they could easily have captured, when the British admiral, whose fleet was lying in the Woosung River off the city, intimated to their commander that he would employ all the forces at his command to resist any attack that might be made on it. Knowing they were too weak to contend with such a powerful foe as the English, they withdrew from the neighbourhood of the town and encamped their army on the ground that is now used as a racecourse.

Next day the general in command forwarded a letter to the English Consul, most touching and most pathetic, that ought to have thrilled the heart of every Englishman, when he remembered the proud boast of his country that it was the friend of the oppressed and that the British flag was the emblem of protection to those who fled to it for refuge.

The letter, freely translated, ran somewhat like the following :—

> "ENGLISH BRETHREN [the word for brethren in Chinese meant the elder brothers and the younger ones in the same family],—We appeal to you not to become our enemy. We are fighting for the freedom of our country, and we know that in time we shall gain the victory and drive our oppressors out of the Middle Kingdom. The Manchus are as much your enemies as they are ours, and they hate you as much as they do us. They have never loved you, and they call you barbarians, and in their hearts they think of you with scorn and contempt. If they had the power they would drive you into the sea to-morrow, and they would rejoice in your destruction.
>
> "Our thoughts are different, and we call you brethren, and when the empire is ours we shall not treat you as strangers, but you shall have every privilege that brethren have a right to claim. We need Shanghai, for we have no port where we can purchase supplies and munitions of war that will enable us to carry on our campaign against the enemies of our country with success.
>
> "We do not ask you to fight on our behalf. We simply pray you, our English brethren, to stand aside and remain neutral, and when we have won we will show you how deep our gratitude is."

The only reply to this most beautiful appeal was the firing of the great guns of the English men-of-war and the hurling of shot and shell into the patriot forces. These with a scream and a roar, as though they were in agony for very shame at the ignominious part that England was taking in aiding the oppressor against the oppressed, flew with many a shriek over the settlement, and filled the hearts of us all with a nameless terror that it was difficult to control.

Later on an even stranger and more bewildering thing took place when General Gordon appeared on the scene. This great man is a true hero in the eyes of every Englishman. His nature was a most tender and compassionate one, and he had the genius that every heart so full of human sympathy as his has of winning the homage of every one that knew him. The suffering and the fallen were drawn to him by a mysterious and irresistible attraction. The mere act of living had no attraction for him, for to suffer for others was his highest ideal of life. He proved this by willingly dying for a people amongst whom he had cast his lot, in order to save them from a cruel tyranny that would have rendered their lives unbearable. And yet, oh ! mystery of mysteries, this great soul, this man whose name shines so brightly in the role of English heroes, actually took his stand on the side of the Manchu conquerors of China, and at the head of his "Ever Victorious Army" was the means in many a bloody battle of causing the death of countless numbers of patriots who faced death in the hope of delivering their country from a great oppression.

It was through the action of the British admiral, who drove the revolutionary army from Shanghai, and of General Gordon, who crushed the revolution, that the fingers of the clock of time were stayed for fifty years in China. Through them the nation's progress was delayed, whilst not one grateful thought nor one generous concession has ever been made to England in recognition of the great delivery that she brought to the Manchus in saving their dynasty from destruction. These rulers had always been anti-foreign and anti-Christian, and there was no sense of gratitude that could untwine these subtle forces that had entwined themselves around their hearts.

And so the years went on, and the nation became more restive, and the secret societies more active and determined in their plans for the destruction of the dynasty that had learned no wisdom since the overthrow of the Taipings. Of late years the rulers had become more assured of the stability of their power, for the railways had come and the telegraphic system, with its mysterious and mystic web, had spread into every province. They began to feel that with these two forces at their command they could quickly nip in the bud any insurrectionary movement that might break out in any part of the empire. But what value are railways and telegraphs when a whole nation rises in arms, determined to have its will obeyed? In a moment they have turned to the side of the oppressed and become their allies in their demand for freedom.

At length Kwang-Su came to the throne and but few dreamed that he would in reality be the last of his race to hold the imperial sway over China. If there was one man in the empire that could have saved the tottering dynasty it was he. He had the most exalted ideas of freedom, and he loved the Chinese as perhaps no other occupant of the Dragon throne had ever done before him.

When the allied forces of the West were marching on Peking and the Court was hurrying in mad haste to get out of the capital, as the royal cavalcade reached the gate through which they were to emerge from the city, Kwang-Su besought the Empress Dowager to proceed on her flight and allow him to remain behind. "Let me stay and die with my people," he pleaded, and the tears that ran down from his eyes showed how deeply he was moved with the thought of the sufferings that were about to come on the citizens of Peking when the foreign forces had entered it.

But the imperious old lady sternly refused to grant his request, and she compelled him to fly with her. Had she and Yuan Shi Kai only known how the fortunes of the royal house were linked with this heroic young ruler they would have treated him with less contempt, for he was the one man in China that day who could have delayed the destruction of a dynasty that had become more and more hateful to the nation. But they had not the prophetic eye to be able to scan the future, and so Fate hurried on to accomplish its purpose.

At last 1911 dawned upon the empire. The gentle-hearted Emperor, with his heart full of plans for the regeneration of China, was gone, and the stern old dame who had guided the affairs of State with an iron hand had vanished suddenly and unexpectedly from the scene, and no one with a master mind could be found to take her place. An Emperor five years old with his father as Regent, more facile in weeping than in grasping the sword and fighting for the throne, were the supreme heads of the State. The hour had come for the great deliverance. The men were ready, and their plans were all thought out, whilst the nation was absolutely united in its passionate desire for freedom.

And then the revolution broke out, and before men could catch their breath, so astonished and amazed were they, the telegraph wires flashed the news through the eighteen provinces and to the far-off kingdoms of the West, that Hankow, in the very heart of the nation, with its splendid arsenal and its inexhaustible stores of war materials, was in the hands of the revolutionaries.

And then with bewildering rapidity city after city far removed from each other hauled down the Dragon flag, and from every house were flung the white ones that were hung out in token of surrender to the new régime.

One of the most remarkable things that has been noticeable in this revolution is the martial spirit that has led every class of the people to hasten to enrol themselves under the standards of the patriot army. Farm lads, that were never suspected of having a drop of fighting blood in their veins, touched by the news that came flying through the land that the moment for China's deliverance had come, dropped the plough and hastened to where the fighting might be expected, ready to die if needs be in the great adventure. Coolies, too, in their faded blue cotton clothes, that would make one smile if any one proposed to turn these slouchy, unwarlike-looking men into soldiers—these, too, as if inspired with a new spirit of patriotism, caught the call to arms. A new thought and a new ambition had come into their hearts which sent the blood flying through their veins to a music that for centuries had never been heard in China.

These men, when they came to stand in front of the enemy, proved of what mettle they were composed. They have shown a fire and a daring that have always been supposed to be the special virtues of the warlike nations of the West, but could never be found in the hearts of the Chinese Brave.

This opinion has been found to be a mistaken one, for it has been discovered that the peasants and the farm hands that have rallied round the leaders of the revolutionary movement have marched out with a new enthusiasm in their hearts and have defeated the highly trained soldiers of the empire. With the exception of a few comparatively insignificant repulses, that have proved of no material benefit to the royal cause, the revolutionaries have everywhere been successful. City after city and province after province have ceased to be under the rule of the Manchus. Even Manchuria, their ancestral home, from which they marched to the conquest of the Flowery Land, has declared its independence, and people of Mongolia, who by ancient ties were bound to a loyal support of the falling dynasty, have taken advantage of its collapse and declared themselves free to rule their own country.

The Manchu rule has ended, and the royal family has formally abdicated. The great question arose: What form of government shall the new régime take? Shall it be monarchical or shall it be republican? The great mass of the people are in favour of the latter, and they have so far acted on their convictions that they have already elected Sun Yat-Sen to be their first President.

It has come as a kind of shock to the West that a people who for so many ages have been ruled by kings and emperors and great viceroys who were possessed of almost regal powers should suddenly come to the determination that they would never be governed again by such haughty potentates, but by parliaments elected by themselves.

This is startling and unexpected, but it has not come altogether as a surprise to those who understand the democratic character of the Chinese mind.

In order to make this matter plain it must be explained that whilst the great territorial divisions of the empire are provinces, Fu or prefectures, and counties, which contain within them immense numbers of towns and cities, large and small, the vast majority of the four hundred millions of Chinese live in villages.

One is amazed at the number of these when travelling through the empire. The great plains are packed with them. The river banks are made beautifully picturesque by the splendid trees that fling out their giant branches and overshadow them. The valleys, too, are relieved of their solitary grandeur by the overflow of life that is found in the villages that thickly dot them, whilst even far up on the hillsides hamlets are perched upon miniature plateaux and amongst gigantic boulders, where people obtain a scanty living from the mountain pines and the thick brushwood that they cut down and sell as firewood to the dwellers below them.

It is from these villages that the Chinese have got the republican idea that is dominating the great majority of the nation at the present moment.

In order to prove this it will be necessary to describe the government that is carried on in each and every one of these throughout the empire.

The real rulers in these are the village elders, who are elected by the people and who are called upon to decide in all cases of dispute that may arise in it. Should a family quarrel arise that threatens to be serious, or some contention about boundaries or the ownership of some disputed piece of land, or indeed any difficulty that threatens the peace of the community, the elders give their judgment, which, in the great majority of cases, is loyally accepted as a settlement of the dispute. The mandarin never interferes in any way in the affairs of the village, and the only time that there is any intimation of his existence is when the tax-gatherer comes round at certain appointed times to collect the Government land tax.

There are times, indeed, when from an English standpoint his presence would seem to be imperatively demanded. Two villages, for example, are having a clan fight, and the men from each come out with guns and blaze away at each other and wound and maim and even kill each other. Both the villages lie, perhaps, right in front of the mandarin's yâmen, but he takes no notice whatever of the conflict that daily takes place between these rustic combatants. The sound of the guns is in his ears the whole day long, but he takes no notice of this serious infraction of the public peace. If you happened to call his attention to it, he would look at you with placid, unwinking eyes, and tell you without a twinkle in them that you were certainly mistaken, for that he had never heard a single gun fired.

The village is left entirely alone without any interference of any one excepting by its own elders, who are the real rulers of it. In so far it is a republic and possesses the most absolute power of home rule.

It is only, and not till then, when some appeal is made to the mandarin by any one in it who is dissatisfied with some decision of the elders by which he is aggrieved that the mandarin seems to become conscious that the village exists at all.

But even then he does not seem to be at all anxious of attacking its liberties that it has enjoyed from time immemorial, for before entering on the case when it has come legally before him, he first summons the elders into his presence and inquires what action they have taken in the matter. If he finds they have acted in a wise and impartial manner, he refuses to upset their decision and he dismisses the case. If, however, he discovers that they have been acting in an unjust and arbitrary fashion, he retries the whole question and gives his own judgment. In any case he is careful not to infringe upon the privileges of governing themselves that have descended to them from the ancient past. The people have thus been trained in the republican idea, which has brought them a large amount of liberty. It is no wonder, then, that at the present crisis, when every one may choose the form of government for the new empire, they should select that which has given them the largest amount of liberty in the past. There is no doubt but this desire for a republican form of government was greatly strengthened by the splendid object-lesson that the nation had in 1909 in the Provincial Parliaments that the Government called into existence that year, as an experiment to see whether the time had not come for the summoning of an imperial parliament for the whole empire.

They proved to be most successful, and every one, both native and foreign, was profoundly amazed at the wise and statesmanlike manner in which the members of the various parliaments brought forward and discussed great questions of State policy.

In one of these a future Chancellor of the Exchequer propounded a scheme for an appeal to the nation to raise by voluntary contributions sufficient money to pay off all the debt that was due to foreign nations, and of thus being enabled to control the finances of the empire.

This was enthusiastically agreed to, though the sum required would amount to close upon two hundred million sterling.

All the other parliaments were communicated with, who were equally unanimous in their approval of this magnificent scheme, which there is very little reason to doubt but that the entire nation would have heartily carried out, for the patriotic spirit had of late been running like fire through the hearts of every class of people throughout the country.

The one thing that has held this splendid conception in abeyance is the difficulty of administering the money after it has been collected. To put it into the hands of the mandarins would be fatal, for most of it would never slip through those fingers that, through the experience of ages, have learned the art of retaining their grip on the public monies that have passed through them. The idea, however, has not been lost, but is slowly working in the veins of this great people, and will come to light again in the near future when the people have gained the control of the nation.

It is no wonder therefore that the people of China desire to have a republic. They would no longer be governed by officials in a distant capital, every one of whom almost grows wealthy on the spoils of the nation. The tyranny and oppression and bribery that are inseparably connected with the rule of the mandarin would be controlled by the State and imperial parliaments. For the first time in the history of the East, the justice and enterprise of the West would inspire with a new life and a loftier ambition this great kingdom of China.

The new empire begins its career with the happiest omens for its future success. Footbinding, that greatest curse that has ever afflicted the womankind of any nation in the world, is doomed.

Some thirty-seven years ago the campaign against this awful crime was started when the present writer called a meeting of the Christian women of Amoy to discuss the question. An anti-footbinding society, called

"The Heavenly Foot Society," was that day formed. With the heroism that lies deeply in the hearts of the women of China, born no doubt out of the agonies and sufferings and excruciating pains they have had to endure for long centuries, they nobly withstood the contempt and scorn that were poured upon them for refusing to bind their daughters' feet and for unbinding their own.

The splendid example of these Christian women has inspired the people of far-off distant provinces with a mighty enthusiasm to set their wives and daughters free. A public conscience has been aroused, and amongst those who have helped in the work of regeneration is that noble Englishwoman Mrs. Archibald Little, who took up this task in the north twenty years after it had been started in Amoy in the south. It requires no special powers of prophecy to predict that before many years have elapsed not a "Golden Lily," the poetic title for footbinding, will be found within the wide limits of the Middle Kingdom. The new republic will see to it that the infamous custom shall not delay long within its rule.

Another most happy omen with which the new empire begins its reign is the absolute certainty that within a year or two opium will disappear from the Flowery Kingdom. The people in the West are often perplexed at the rapidity with which a most monstrous vice that overshadowed the whole country from the Yellow Sea on the east to Tibet on the west, and from the Great Wall in the north to the China Sea in the south should have been controlled and stifled. It seems but yesterday that the blight was everywhere, and now to-day men talk confidently of its speedy disappearance.

A chapter out of my own experience will explain the mystery and show how the thing has been done. For many years I lived in the County of Harmonious Peace, where the poppy was largely cultivated.

At the proper season of the year and in certain districts the country looked most beautiful and picturesque with the white and purple flowers of the poppy. They presented a most charming picture, but poverty and disaster and death lay within that exquisite scene.

Opium-shops and opium-smokers grew apace, and the farmers, having always a supply in the home, used it for almost every ailment that the flesh was heir to. Before the sick knew where they were, they were under the spell of the "Black Earth," as it was popularly called, and they were immured in a dungeon from which there was no deliverance.

At last the hour came when China rose in her might and determined to crush out the life of this its most deadly foe, and so orders were sent from Peking to exterminate the poppy.

These came to the chief magistrate of the County of Harmonious Peace. He happened to be a man of great determination of character and a deadly foe to opium, as he saw it was ruining his country. He had not to consider constitutional law, or juries, or popular journals with conservative tendencies. Luckily for him he had not, for these are sworn foes to heroic reforms. The methods by which he was to carry out the commands of the Government were left entirely to his own discretion.

One morning he caused to be issued a proclamation that he posted all over the county. It appeared in all places where crowds are wont to gather, in market towns, in front of famous idol temples, where a constant stream of worshippers entered, and on the thoroughfares where men were passing up and down the livelong day. This is the usual method by which a mandarin conveys his orders to the county.

When men caught a sight of the proclamation their black eyes gleamed with excitement and delight, for though many of them were growers of the poppy, the new patriotism was burning within their hearts, and they were glad that their country was going to be saved from disaster.

The proclamation commanded that henceforth no man might grow the poppy within the county, and declared that any one that dared to do so, when found out, would be punished by the confiscation to the State of his fields, whilst the elders of the village in which he lived would be severely punished for allowing him to disobey his orders.

Not content with this, the mandarin took a journey of fifteen miles along a villainous unpaved road to visit the pastor of a native church in my district. He said: "I have come to see you to obtain your help in carrying out this plan that I have adopted for the extermination of the opium out of my jurisdiction. My people," he continued, "will not obey me, and large numbers of them will try and gain money by taking bribes and by shielding the guilty by not giving me information. I know that you Christians have always been opposed to opium. You, indeed, have been the true patriots of the empire, and so I come confidently to you for the assistance that I am not sure my own subjects will give me. I propose to put a certain area under your supervision, and I wish you to come and inform me whenever you find any farmer planting the poppy. Let me know who he is, and I shall have no difficulty in finding out where he is."

"And have you informed against any one?" I asked the pastor, when he told me of the interesting interview he had had with the mandarin.

"Oh, no," he replied. "I had a better plan than that. I could not bear the thought of injuring any one, and so, when I discovered that some man had planted the poppy, and the plants were showing their green, innocent-looking heads above the ground, I visited him. After a few words of friendly greeting, I said to him, 'You know that the "Great Man" [a common name for the mandarin] has made me promise to inform him whenever I find any one disobeying his decree about the poppy. Unless you, in my presence here, pull up your crop, I must at once write him and give him your name. You know then the awful consequences that will follow. Your land will be taken from you, and you will be cast into prison, and what will become of your wife and your little ones then? Pull up every plant, and you shall have no further trouble in the matter.' Of course," he continued, "the man was only too delighted to be let off so easily, and in a few minutes the poppy-stalks were lying disconsolate and broken-hearted on the bank overlooking the field in which they had been growing."

That year no white and purple blossoms turned the land into a thing of beauty, and no poppies reared their heads defiantly to the sun. They had vanished out of the whole country, and not a stalk could be seen where once they had flaunted their immoral beauty in the light of high Heaven.

The rights of men, it is true, had been disregarded by this masterful mandarin, but better that, according to the opinion that was everywhere expressed, than that women should weep, and children starve, and the home be wrecked.

Now go through the countless counties where four hundred millions of people live, and see how the same process is going on in all of them, and behold! the secret of how the opium scourge has been destroyed stands forth revealed. It is a secret no longer, but we see before us the masterful Celestial with strength of will in his soul, and a high ideal of righteousness, with a new sense of patriotism throbbing in his heart, and you begin to realise the mighty force the Chinese are.

One element of strength that comes with the new republic is the fact that the man who has engineered the revolution is a Christian. He has the most loyal devotion of the men that have risked their lives with him. His influence is seen in the little loss of human life that has been allowed by the revolutionaries. There never has been in all the history of China such a bloodless revolution as this last one. It must be an omen of gladness to the whole nation that Jesus has at last come to take His place in the councils of the empire. Kang-hi, a celebrated heathen emperor, in his great imperial dictionary that has been in the hands of the scholars of China for at least two centuries and a half, defined Him as being "the Saviour of the life of the world." This silent, unconscious prophecy is at length being fulfilled in the new thoughts about the preciousness of life that have come with the dawn of the new republic.

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